

# Lesley Battler | Journal | 1986





## **Journal archive project**

### **Introduction**

As a young reader i was fascinated by diaries, journals, notebooks of all kinds. Perhaps part of that attraction was that they seemed a way of telling your own story, remaking the world as you went on. “They” never have the final say in your journal.

I grew up in a family that was shattered by mental illness and writing in a journal was a discipline and a way of keeping myself together; proof I could build an independent life. I was never big on recording my most intimate feelings or expressing myself. For me, the journal existed to help me let go and move beyond the emotional, interior world. I was so much more interested in recording the flora and fauna of the mundane. Daily life was exotic to me.

From the 1980s and on into the Naughts, I wrote in a journal, which I eventually transcribed into electronic format as a project to keep me occupied during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. At first it felt like a self-indulgent pastime, certainly a little irrelevant considering world-events, but as I continued I started feeling maybe there was some value to the project. I decided to preserve them as archives, format them as PDFs and release them onto the Internet where anyone can search, download and use any of the material for projects of their own.

To me, this journal is really an archive, portrait of an era as seen by one insignificant person. It's the insignificance that is truly key here. I love the archives and records of the invisible lives that accumulate into social zeitgeists. Being a journal, it's hit-and-miss what I wrote about, or had time to write about. Huge chunks of my life never made it to the page while there may be hundreds of words devoted to a movie I enjoyed on a hot summer night. I have not added any narrative arc or changed names to keep the journal as intact as possible.

In such a long time span the journal volumes reveal a generation trying to find their way in the world; me and so many of my friends and acquaintances working contract jobs, going to community colleges to learn vocational skills. Spoiler alert: societal change, turbulence, employment issues, generational conflict were just as strong then as they are now. While transcribing the journals I also became fascinated by the rhythm of daily life, how periods of calm so often erupt into times of intense change.

I have taken the original journals and reformatted them into chronological years that begin in January and end in December, and I have included a synopsis with each one to provide a little context. I preserved as much as possible the style and quirks of the original handwritten journals and only employed some light editing to correct place names, and obvious mis-spellings.

These volumes are meant for anyone who is interested in the 1980s and 1990s, in archives, in the lives of young people trying to find a place in the world, in personal impressions of socio-economic-cultural events. This, of course, includes the introduction of the Internet to our daily lives. Please feel free to browse, reuse, recycle any of this material for your own projects. After all this time I still believe information wants to be free.

## **Vol. 6, 1986**

Astrological discussions at RCMP Headquarters in Montréal – Aftermath of a death – Irreparable rift between friends – Exploring Judaism with friends – Service at an orthodox synagogue – Visit from Colin Browne – Lost in Point St-Charles – Nuclear melt-down at Chernobyl in Ukraine – My father is diagnosed with cancer – Another move – I write for the Federation of Canadian Astrologers – Kathy Acker reads at les Foufounes électriques – Acceptance into the MA program at Concordia University.

**Jan. 8**

Applying for a library job at McGill University. Phoned BHCL, talked with Mary for a while, then asked for Kevin. Kevin wasn't in so I asked Howard for a reference. Howard took my request seriously, professionally. Then we ended up in one of these Wonderland Howard conversations, the kind we always had on the train.

“We – Kevin and I – were just talking about you the other day.”

“And?”

“Well, actually it was Mary who brought it up. She was wondering if Kevin had heard from you and Kevin said he was sure you were too busy to call Broadcast Holdings. How are you?”

“Well, I am very busy.”

“Good – glad to hear it. I guess that's good for the soul and for the pocket book.”

“Still better for the soul than for the pocket book.”

“But Lesley, in the long run it's better to do things for the sake of your soul.”

I really do miss those guys.

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Received my first ASM Tape Club phone call. I have some tapes in my little library now, thanks to Fred's job at Astral, where I can get tapes re-taped at no cost, and also discounts on blank top-of-the-line cassettes. Deena should be pleased. They have also been catalogues. I have a file of subject headings which I created myself – a true special library. I'm building it with Library of Congress in mind, always thinking about expansion, integration.

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Beautiful letter from Andrea Jones. I had sent her a card and a copy of *The Little Prince*, thinking she might like it.

“Dear Lesley

Thank you, thank you, thank you!!! Before I opened your parcel, I too, was reminded of *The Little Prince*. Your card was perfect in every respect, and what to my wondering eyes should appear, but a copy of the one and only. I had never read it. Sold thousands, but never read it. My friend Linda, who is the children’s librarian here at Scugog made me read first, the part about “taming.” She has been separated for more than a year but that part was especially meaningful for her. She felt her ex would never understand it.

We are really kindred spirits, you and I ... When you decide to embark, let me know. I promise I’ll put down my book and join you.”

Andrea also mentioned hearing from Mikiko and that she seems happy and well-adjusted, translating for a news magazine.

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Surprise phone call from Kim. She was fired from her job at Consumer’s Distributing. Says she hates not having a job to go to although she’s not altogether happy in the library profession. She is now thinking about returning to work in a day care. The Seneca College guidance counselor was unsympathetic and didn’t give Kim enough credit for responsibility or hard work. I have no doubt that happened. The Seneca instructors used to stereotype her that way as well. The Group met at the Old Spaghetti Factory and everyone was present, including Johanne Cunliffe. They read out our old predictions of two years ago and Kim said they were hilarious. Kim and Ellen are the two that see each other most frequently now. Ellen has started stepping out this year. That trip she took to London with Kim and Mika seems to have unlocked something. She went to Spain this year and is planning her life dream trip to Egypt for next year. She has also left Consumer’s for another job.

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Called Marsha. She sounded very subdued and I feared I had really made a mistake in making this call. She seemed suspicious of my reasons for calling, asking me a couple of times why I called. She sounded a lot like Val, which really worried me. I kept going until the ice was broken, then she brought up the elephant in the room – Sharon – and we could finally talk about what happened.

The weekend with Sharon cut her to the quick. Sharon made Marsha feel she was a terrible hostess, had no social graces and that she was forcing Sharon to do all these things against her will. This has always been an essential conflict between them. Marsha is sociable. She enjoys people and takes on enormous responsibility for her guests and for the dinners and parties she arranges. She loves to bring people together but Sharon seems to only want to be exclusively with her. Sharon seems to associate sociability with superficiality and shallowness.

We both feel cowardly with Sharon and often feel we lose self-integrity. I told Marsha that I often felt betrayed by Sharon. Or if not betrayed, a pawn in some kind of two-faced game she is playing. Sharon told me she couldn't blame the boy who had hit Ernie because he hadn't really done anything wrong. Meanwhile Sharon told Marsha that she is incredibly depressed that the police might not be able to press charges on the boy who killed Ernie. When Marsha protested Sharon had said, "Well *someone* has to pay!" Seems as if I just receive nice "p.r." lines – but why?

Marsha talked about the fascination Sharon's negativity has held for her since Queen's days. She definitely agrees that I see a completely different side to her. Marsha feels she is on the front-lines, wading through the mud with Sharon, never getting a reprieve, only more and more dumped on her. Sharon's Christmas card to Marsha stated that she couldn't have got through 1985 without her and she wouldn't be able to make it into 1986 without her either. She sent Fred and me a Christmas card which basically thanked us for being true friends during "the crisis." Then there was London! Sharon had been angling for a long time to be invited to England with Marsha, but when I talked about going over myself and thinking about finding a partner, Sharon didn't say a word about wanting to go. In fact, she told me people shouldn't idealize other countries.

I finally asked Marsha if she had any idea why we get two opposite Sharons. I also confessed to often feeling like a furniture-warmer, babysitter or object rattling around between the two of them, where the real story is taking place. She understood my feelings, was honest and listened closely to what I had to say throughout the conversation. It seems as if she has been pondering the same things. She told me that out of all her friends Sharon is “fondest” of me. The only way she could describe it is that Sharon needs, or likes the “concept of me, the idea or ideal of me.” We joked about the Bat as Allegory. Sharon does see me as a kindred spirit but with the stress on the spirit. “This gets into the more mystical side of Sharon, but it’s like you’re not quite of this earth for her. Also I think she feels you have to be protected. I’m the one that comes out of the slime and mud she feels she has to wrestle with, but you’re something beyond that. I’d be perfectly happy to have you able to walk along beside me in the mud – but the way Sharon slots people ... it’s kind of for life.”

Marsha also said that she had been growing ever more distant to Sharon after Ernie, and “now it feels like a two ton weight of needful Sharon landing on me.” This was a vulnerable pensive Marsha but one full of depth and insight. It was a long conversation but it seems both of us really needed this talk. So much lately it has been her and Sharon, me and Sharon, to the point where Marsha and I were losing each other.

### **Jan. 10**

Read Walter Abish’s *In the Future Perfect*. The same weird horrific mix of everyday and atrocity I saw at the Holocaust Memorial Centre. Abish establishes or re-establishes the familiar in what is foreign, which is an uneasy state, creating a feeling of discomfort or menace. Reminiscent of William Trevor in the taut, inevitable build-up of suspense, careful selection of detail, what is revealed to us about the characters, the breakdown and reconstruction of language, the relation between language and the interior. Especially in “The English Garden” where the images and history of the old concentration camp show through the modern city that has been built over it.



Every word is a trap door, or a brick which can at any moment be pulled out and plummet you down into something deep, dark, vast. This, I think, is the meaning of the little footnote or mathematical numbers beside each set of words in “Ardor/Awe/Atrocity.” These numbers gave me the feeling of all the meanings, connotations, past history and knowledge with which the words could possibly resonate without limiting them, giving the sense of multiple meanings, reverberations, overtones, chords. The last paragraph of the book is the most haunting for me. It seems to reverberate across the endless expanse of time, vast, lonely or haunting as the desert in the story, “Crossing the Great Void.”

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Special delivery letter from Colin. He will be in town from Sunday night to Friday evening and wants to get together with everyone.

Night drive in frost and moonlight. Some rooftops and spires surrounded by violet smoke. Tiny dark masts of boats cut the creamy expanse of snow on the water, distant shores folding into each other. Into the industrial area, full of factories, stiff statues of severe bearded men, captains of industry, robber barons, grim old warehouses with blocky white print, filmed windows, narrow streets and ruelles where you could easily imagine Jack the Ripper.

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Called Lila about Colin’s letter, then called Stephen. He sounds low, depressed. He’s not happy with his script-writing class and feels it drains his energy away from real creative work. He said he is sticking with the course because he needed contact with other writers – which is exactly the only reason I’m sticking with this fiction class. Stephen took all the arrangements out of my hands by volunteering his apartment. He contacted Michèle Gauthier, invited ten or so people and is even making us all a pasta dinner.

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Met Robert Philion at RCMP headquarters. He greeted us warmly and expansively with a mock-pompous handshake. He is endearing and honest, the perfect stereotype of a Canadian Mountie. Carolyn Springer and Evelyn Alguire joined us. I like Carolyn. She is a sensitive, intuitive Piscean with a warm, humorous Sagittarian ascendant. Charts are wonderful gateways to incredibly intimate conversations. I know details about these people I don't know about closer friends. Robert asked us how one knew if one was intuitive. This seemed a curious question for him to ask because he is very intuitive, especially in his feelings about people. We talked about my Saturn in Sagittarius in the First House and he remarked that I was cautious in projecting myself; I said things that were very profound but with great delicacy and subtlety so that these things were easily lost.

Mary Rose read out our Sabian symbols. Robert didn't think he understood at first, but he needs time to absorb, time to take things in. This is a problem he has with people. They don't understand how his mind works and will interrupt him and interject quickly. "Conversations have to move at a pace that are so quick quick quick I get left behind." He talked about the difficulties he has with his own family, how he feels oppressed every time he speaks to them. He is the youngest of a large family and his mother was indifferent toward him. He figures this has a lot to do with his lack of confidence and eagerness to please. At one point I said something, I don't remember what, and Robert pointed at me and said, "See? See what I mean? See how delicately and subtly that was put? You just run these things right by us." We stayed and stayed until it grew dark, until we couldn't think of anything else to say. These discussion groups are extraordinary – I've never experienced anything like this before.

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Colin's brief but high-energy phone call. His chuckle, his way of speaking, as if he had just wafted into town by parachute. He is working at the NFB, looking up old films for something he is working on in Vancouver. Specifically, a film depicting "a group of people on a ship-board holiday with the paper hats on their heads and those great 1920s costumes."

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Great talk with Lila about writing after class. She asked me some probing questions about my writing ambitions. I said much as I do enjoy the act of writing I really don't know what my ambitions are about it. I would like to publish a book, but I don't really want to be "a writer," live "the writing life." She was very curious about this and asked me why. I said I wasn't sure, but I've had enough people idealize me that I don't want to be that "Victorian girl in the turret writing." For some reason it's more important to me to have a real career and prove to myself I can function in the world. Then Lila asked me why I didn't think writing could be that real career in the world. I didn't really have an answer to that. Lila then suggested that I have my stories and journals discovered posthumously as a document of the historical climate at the "fin de siècle."

Lila asked me if I was going to have children. She was just making the point that I had better build up a lot of material before I did so – speaking from her own experience as a mother of two. I told her I had thought about it a few years ago (when Fred and I were living on Somerled) but something inside wouldn't allow it. It was a terrible time to be even thinking of it and I couldn't bring another life into the world until I knew who I was, and until I knew I could support myself. I didn't have very much going for me at that time, which made me really vulnerable to wanting to fill the void with a child, a trap so many young women fall into. Lila then suggested I was waiting for my writing career to develop.

### **Jan. 14**

Went to Stephen's for our class reunion party. He looked elegant as usual, dressed in the warm deep colours that suit him so well. Ira looked jazzy in new pants and a little bow-tie. She was so pleased when I complimented her, said she was changing her image to look as young and as less like a teacher as possible. So many tones in her smile; shrewdness, intelligence, boldness. Marc LeMay also looked elegant, stream-lined, enchanted by Ira. He paid her compliment after compliment, and Ira was over-the-moon with the attentions of the young men. Colin arrived, in his black coat, beret, cherry red scarf. He looked exactly the same and it was impossible to think it's been a year since the class.

Michèle, Cathy and David arrived. Great to see Cathy, who was glowing with health and energy. Sally didn't come because she couldn't escape from her husband. That situation has gone from bad to worse, and if I heard Cathy and Michèle right, Sally attempted suicide and they visited her in the hospital. I also think I heard Sally and her husband are divorcing. Please let this be so.

Talk with Cathy and Lila about advertising and how people like Calvin Klein are not showing women any more, the growing tendency to create without woman. Then we went on to talking about Reagan, Cathy's summer in London Ontario, the 1980s in general – the unifying theme being conservatism.

Someone asked us what age or year we would rather be in. I said that when I was young I had always looked up to people five or so years older than I was, so the late 1960s would be a good time for me to be an adult, old enough to join in, actually able to help change the world. I said it feels like a shabby trick to finally get to be this age and have it all disappear and end up back in fundamentalist, pearl-clutching, Ronald Reagan times.

I also wish I could have been this age living in Paris in the 1920s. I told Lila I wanted to live Anaïs Nin's life. Cathy was also attracted to the 1920s. She is full of surprises, and it seems as if she's learned a lot about the world over the summer. While this conversation was going on, I heard "Jerusalem" being mentioned. People were talking about my story to Colin. Colin and Ira were talking about "LB" and I didn't catch on that they were talking about me. Colin thought I was being coy.

Stephen served us a delicious pasta dinner and there was plenty of wine and champagne. Since his apartment is as hot as ours, the windows were open and we all enjoyed the feeling of being at a summer picnic in January. Colin talked about his film project. It is a film he is making about his family, which entails talking to women in his family about a great-grandfather. They would invariably talk about this man in a tone of respect, outline all his accomplishments, but Colin could detect a resentment and anger that extends beyond the great-grandfather to all men. He said his family has movies of these women sitting in chairs by a pool taking deadly aim with hoses and spritzing all the boys, their grandsons. Colin and his sister had to come to terms with all this resentment.

This led everyone to talk about their families. Marc mentioned that his parents never talked about their past or family history and he only found out recently that his people were originally from Normandy. Although he is French, speaks and reads it fluently, he identifies with the English, says he writes and thinks in English. David Gosselin is half-French, half-English and says he never feels he belongs in either group.

Things I did not know about Colin before tonight. He went to RMC (Royal Military College in Kingston). I would never guess that in a million years. He is about the same age as Ira. He is living with a woman named Mary who is a film-maker and they are moving into a house.

I half-reluctantly gave Colin an envelope with some work, “The Aleph,” “Alchemy” and “Jerusalem.” He had asked to see them but I still felt opportunistic giving him the envelope as if that was the only reason for going to the party. Everyone left at the same time. Fred met us upstairs and finally got to meet Stephen. Colin called him a “handsome man.” Soon as I got home I knew I wouldn’t be able to sleep.

## **Jan. 18**

Lecture on horary astrology with Dot Figg. Robert and I sat in the back and carried on a whispered conversation until Carolyn came and joined us. Robert designated me “row monitor.” Dott Figg looks like a beautician. Her spelling and grammar is atrocious, which bothers me. Like psychology, astrology depends so much on the language used by the astrologer in the analysis or interpretation of the chart. I just think it’s really unprofessional for an astrologer to use poorly constructed, vague or cliched language. I don’t think horary astrology is for me. It all seemed very trivial – status and the acquisition of objects.

Talking with Robert and Carolyn at break was more interesting than the astrology. Robert said he grew up in an English milieu in Sudbury but he and his family always spoke French at home. He grew up thinking everyone spoke English in stores, businesses and out on the streets but spoke French at home. French became a private, internal, almost secret language to him. He was also shocked when he was taken into a home where the people did not speak French.

When he spoke French to the people and they did not respond in French, he assumed they did not like him and wouldn't speak to him in the the intimate language. What a wonderful detail for a story! Susan came over and teased him about the Mounties' red coats. Robert told her not to be funny – he was serious about that. She laughed and wrinkled her nose, looking just like a cat.

Robert, Carolyn and I walked to the Metro. Being with Carolyn seems to bring out Robert's whimsical side. He started talking about why the RCMP wear panty hose and was speculating on what kind of dress he should wear. We parted at the Metro, and I decided to go back and prowling around Multimags.

I ran across the street to avoid the light and ran into Howard Gliserman. Of course, instead of a suit he was wearing a jacket, jeans, an old cardigan. He did express some surprise when he spotted me, and we ended up in another Alice in Wonderland conversation. I told him I was late meeting someone.

“Well where are they?” he said, looking around.

“I'm hoping they didn't leave.”

“There you see,” he said giving me one of his Howardly mock-lessons. “There wasn't any need to be in such a rush. It didn't help anything now, did it, Lesley. He or she or they aren't here.”

Then he asked me about the McGill University law library job. I told him it might be a long time before he hears from them regarding the job, as they haven't even received their grant yet. He laughed, being rather familiar with that. I said I wish I had known this and he said, “Well it would be nice but life is just like that sometimes.”

He said he was in a hurry, wished me well and said over his shoulder, “At least it's good exercise.”

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Went to see the Yugoslavian movie *When Father Was Away on Business*. The little boy, Malik, sleepwalked and would find himself picking his way across a narrow bridge in the darkness with the moonlight shining below. He could show so much depth of feeling with such subtlety. He lived in a world where language means something different than intended.

This is a world where words are distorted, collapsed into slogans, propaganda, advertisement. Yet at the same time, people can be banished for uttering the wrong words, a tiny step off the party line. Words mean nothing at all, yet contain the power of life and death.

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Raining. Such a changeable January. Rainy-day talk with Fred at the Croissant de lune about Ya'acov's eight languages then a cruise along Gouin. Along the way I dropped two ASM tapes off at Jeanne Gauvin's. Her house was like something out of *Architectural Digest* with a soaring cathedral ceiling, classical music playing in the background. Jeanne was very nice and invited me in for a while. She has been interested in astrology for a long time. It does seem as if astrology is a pastime for some extremely well-heeled people.

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Sharon called. This time I got a defensive belligerent Sharon. A wounded Sharon. She received a letter from Marsha and took it hard. The trouble with Marsha is that she often gives no indication at the time what she is feeling and when lets loose it feels like something coming out of the blue. In Kingston she was talking about having Sharon stay an extra day so they could go to a movie. No wonder Sharon could not have expected this letter. I know this has been on Marsha's mind for a long time and wasn't surprised. I also hope our phone call didn't trigger it. It really disturbs me imagining Sharon reaching into her mailbox pulling out a letter from Marsha, expecting something pleasant and supporting and finding this devastating missive. I agreed with Sharon that a telephone call would have been better but Sharon declared that Marsha always sends her these letters because she is afraid of her.

I tried to present Marsha's viewpoint and Sharon said, "How would you know what's going on in her mind?" She also said that her only reason for calling me was to find out if Fred and I were still her friends – as if we all came as a package deal. I have learned a few things since Elrond and one of those things is to be honest about where I stand. I said I was her friend and I was Marsha's friend.

Bluff and bluster notwithstanding, Sharon had some valid points. “There’s no way I am going to believe I have that much power over all those people to spoil their entire weekend – and even if I did, why would they think any the worse of *Marsha*?” Point well taken. But Marsha has her side too, and deep feelings about Sharon. I tried to tell her that Marsha was not closing the door to communication and that Sharon should talk to her if their relationship is worth anything to her (and it is).

This made Sharon become defensive and threatening again. She went on about how she didn’t know if the relationship was worth it and that she would give it a lot of thought and come to her decision. Sharon told me that Marsha is always doing this to her and that “she had been so good for a while” - as if Marsha is just some laboratory friend whose behaviour is monitored constantly noted and judged. When speaking with either of these two I know how they feel, how they think and I can see both sides so clearly. I find myself agreeing with both of them, because both of them have really valid points. Plus there is a history between Marsha and Sharon that I don’t share.

## **Jan. 21**

Why am I still in this dreadful workshop? Is it because I don’t believe I deserve anything better? Some kind of self-punishment? To quit now would be giving up and admitting that I can’t stand my ground with these two blowhards. God, with the great pasty-white head who, in January of the class year, still pronounces Ira’s name, “Eye-ra.” And Stoneface, also known as Jim Lewis, who may be even worse. I picture him becoming an embittered hack writing the same conventional story all his life and eating his heart out with jealousy over the rest of us who have moved on. I suspect he may be jealous of me because I am prolific, and my stories are of too high a quality to be dismissed as “just another Lesley Battler story,” as they have actually said about Jeff Kahan’s work. So here I am still. Instead of letting the boys sit back to enjoy their brandy and cigars I rattle their cages by turning in as wide a variety of work as I can conjure.



They “discussed” “Ant Colony” today. Scott said in his opening remarks that he was “so very impressed by the quality of the prose and precision of the language.” He also mentioned the chilly haunted quality in Benjamin’s perceptions, the edge that exists in the language. He also said the style “definitely feels Northern, cool and hard-edged,” my use of language “sensitive and precise.” He also said I could almost get away with blue murder, that my voice is so compelling the reader gets carried away in spite of structural flaws.

I thought this was a simple allegory and was dismayed by all the interpretations of the story. The sections I had just tossed in about Benjamin’s parents were focused on to the exclusion of anything else. Everyone went baying after them like hounds after a fox. I realize I should have left that out completely because those are the type of details people do fixate on in fiction. Scott talked about context, or the lack thereof, in the story but I only wanted to portray this one moment, this one afternoon in the park.

I wanted a distant, chill language to go beyond the boy playing a game with ants in a park. Actually, I don’t think this wants to be a story at all. Or at least not the kind they value so much in workshops. Ira understood what I was trying to do. She said the voice was an internal voice, not what Benjamin was saying or even thinking, but it was a subconscious voice and that was why it had to be written in that way. Whatever it’s failings as a story, Stoneface has no right to say I have no business trying it! If that is so, then why are these classes referred to as workshops?

The entire second half was taken with this story. Scott said I didn’t look satisfied and started the subject up again. As people were filing out of the classroom (enough is enough!) God started discoursing on the story based on his impressions on the first paragraph - which was all he had read. Steven Frank lingered, grinning and supporting me. Ira was indignant and told me (while the Great Talking Head was still blatting) not to pay any attention to him. Finally Scott broke it up.

Stoneface lingered behind, patronizingly attacking the story and talking about how I had to follow the conventions. I do not know why he felt he needed to repeat this. I agree with what most of the class said and truly think this piece shouldn’t be a story and instead of trying to shoe-horn it into one, I will cut out the narrative elements that are leading it in that direction.

Scott must have realized my feathers were seriously ruffled for we talked a long time after everyone else had left. He agreed the speech on conventions was irrelevant. He also told me my writing was “deft” and I already had half the battle won by my compelling use of the language. I missed my ride with Lila and Ira. Fortunately, it was a beautiful night for walking. A hint of springtime. Delicate white branches outlined against a purplish sky.

### **Jan. 22**

Call about a job interview at Towers Perrin Forster and Crosby, a management consulting firm downtown on Boul. Dorchester.

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Bounded onto the 105 bus at Vendome and spotted Stoneface. I took out my book and read it with great concentration. An old woman boarded and I gave her my seat. We had a pleasant exchange. Not ten minutes after this, Stoneface yielded his seat to someone. He got off at my stop. Apparently he (because of course he does) lives only a street away from me.

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Received a surprise package in the mail from Japan! I opened it and found a portfolio consisting of eight envelopes. Each envelope in turn contained two beautiful photos of the Silk Road. There was a map of the route on each envelope. The photos depicted mountains, pagodas, statues of Buddha, all accompanied by pages of text, all written in Japanese. In the last envelope I found Mikiko’s letter, which didn’t add any details to my mysterious package except that she sent this to me as a Christmas present. What a wonderful surprise, perfect exactly the way it is.

### **Jan. 28**

Uneventful class. The Lord God Almighty himself asked for a copy of “Ant Colony” because he was anxious to read it. That didn’t stop him from pontificating at me (or trying to) last week. I didn’t have any extra copies. After class, Lila, Terry Garwood and I met for coffee. Terry left to catch his train. Lila and I lingered and had a long talk. We continued talking on the bus. Lila’s age bothers her very much. She disparages herself and her writing because of her age. Both of us, however, are uncertain where to take our writing or what to do when the year ends. She told me her husband had been molesting a child who had been living in their home and she was divorcing him. Day by day her perception of him changed until she found his presence revolting. Wow. I wonder how I would react if I found that out about Fred. Pretty sure I would not be able to even look at him again.

### **Jan. 29**

Job interview at TPF&C. Nothing went as planned. I got lost at Place Bonaventure, the bus was held up but I was right on time. Thank goodness for being so anal about punctuality and leaving ridiculously early. In a way the misadventures were rather fun. I wandered through Place Bonaventure in my suit carrying a briefcase and even sat down in a café and read a magazine in proper executive-style. The number of mirrors in these places, all the chrome and tinted glass. I enjoyed the masquerade but it was a little disconcerting to keep meeting myself, tall and thin, short and fat, green-tinted every time I turned a corner. The longer it took to reach my destination the more I felt as if the costume was falling apart.

Fascinating to be inside an office tower, so far above and removed from the motion and masses below. A million rooms like cells with elevators moving silently up and down, never crashing through the ceiling, launching the business-suited men and women into space, and never allowed to drop through the ground floor to enter the dark infernal regions below the crust of the earth. The whole idea is suspension. These elevators are carpeted, muted – and there is no elevator muzak.

The office itself is on the 30<sup>th</sup> floor and sunlight streamed through the windows. I could see the ships moving down the river, a busy bright world of office towers and smoke stacks. The office looked like something out of “Dynasty,” soft plush carpeting, pink and grey walls, art work on the walls that I am sure wasn’t rented from a cultural centre. I felt as if I were encased inside an astronaut suit, peering out through the little window, connected by a long cord to a distant oxygen tank. All the little work-stations gave me a feeling of playing house or playing office.

Greeted by three small people; Sari Bercovitz, Bev Church and Dawn Chipps. Sari gave me a cup of coffee and I followed her down the grey-pink carpet, anxious about spilling the coffee. It doesn’t look as if anyone has ever spilled here. Maybe it’s not possible to spill, it freezes and disappears into the engineered air before it can hit the floor. I think I answered their questions well enough. There is always a point when your personal preparation and control end, and it’s all in their hands. Dawn seemed rather enigmatic. We sat at the conference table and while Bev was asking questions, Dawn looked at me – very intently. Both of them look like the models of librarians we were given at Seneca. I can easily imagine Bev giving a speech for Mrs Weihs extolling the praises of this profession.

After the interview I wandered through Place Bonaventure, just enjoying myself being a person carrying a briefcase in the heart of the business sector. No strong feelings either way as to whether I’ll get the job. Decided to meet Fred at Astral. He is working with Ya’acov today and Ya’acov has been pestering Fred about meeting me. I guess I should get it over with, although I feel a bit like a side-show attraction. I got lost. Hopelessly lost and ended up trundling the wrong way down the Trans Canada, lugging this briefcase and feeling tremendously pompous and self-important. I ended up at John F Kennedy Comprehensive High School – wherever that is – and used my last quarter to call Fred. By the time he arrived the doors were chained. I was trapped in a labyrinth and unless Fred found the right door I would be there forever. Finally made it to Astral and met Ya’acov. I was not at my best. He is bright, funny, sociable and opinionated. Quick with comments, jokes. I’m not verbally skilled at the best of times and I was pretty drained. For some reason I feel rather intimidated by Ya’acov, probably because of his verbal dexterity.

**Jan. 30**

Sari Bercovitch called. I got the job at TPF&C. It's a contract, but it's a real job on the 30<sup>th</sup> floor of an office tower. Then Sally Qureshi called. She spoke rapidly, breathlessly, her sentences crumbling. She invited me to a party at Michèle Gauthier's on Saturday.

**Feb. 1**

Michèle's party. A dream evening in this soft snow that could conceal everything and the buildings could all disappear and the entire city shut down. The only light seemed to emit from the snow itself and it is unreal, ghostly like a dream or memory. It felt as if Michèle was living somewhere in a fairytale Russia. Ran into David Gosselin, and it felt as if we were the only living souls on the street tonight. It seemed appropriate that we would meet like this, he seems to suit this world. He is intriguing, has a psychological way of looking at things, a thoughtful perspective. He said he likes the stories on the 50<sup>th</sup> page of the newspaper, long past the headlines. Up a narrow staircase, abandoned factory across the street.

Stephen Schettini greeted me and said, "I've been hearing about you. Apparently Scott Lawrence bought something at Stephen's computer store. As he was paying Stephen asked, "Are you Scott Lawrence – the writer?" He pulled back and looked startled. Not sure how or why the conversation turned to me but Stephen told me Scott said I was "very talented." Received a lot of generous praise. The trouble is that most people are interested in the Crissy stories. Only Stephen asked about my new work. All the talk about children's stories and after-school specials featuring Crissy started depressing me. When I mentioned this to Fred he said I was an ingrate. Only Stephen seems to really get it.

Sally and her husband were there. He appeared to be enjoying himself. Sally looked rather "Arabian Night-ish," a princess in captivity dressed in a pastel tunic. Her new haircut also accentuated the deepness of her eyes. Also Arabian Night-ish is the concealment, deceptions, apparent submissiveness. She served everyone and waited on her husband hand and foot. All of Sally's internal life, her individuality, is hidden.

Cathy and I had a great talk about the nature of illusion and disillusion. She is extremely interested in women's issues and described the attraction-repulsion she feels about the image behind the "real woman" movement. I am so far from being a "real woman," or even even having that choice, that this isn't something that concerns me very much. She told a story about the first time she ever went sailing and how she got sick. Her point was the disillusionment of it; how her being sick blinded her to the romance of it. I was enjoying our talk until one of the technical computer guys present cut in on our talk with an anecdote about how he got sick while sailing. Both Cathy and I were frustrated at having our talk cut off like that.

The party was divided into the writing camp and the technical computer camp. Fred stayed in the living room talking about computers and businesses. Poor Stephen was torn between the two camps. He didn't want to think about his job but would find himself pulled to it in spite of himself. Stephen in general seems a man torn. Lila told me that his ex-wife won't sign papers that would allow him to become a landed immigrant, which makes him a man without a country. She thinks he is deeply divided between his life now and the ascetic life he was living in the monastery. Stephen and I talked for a while. He hopes to visit Tibet and he wants to see "The Aleph."

Sally invited me to join her, Cathy and Michèle at Carlo's and Pepe's on Tuesdays. Cathy asked me if I wanted to do something with her and David. We decided to go to a jazz bar together. I hope we do stay in contact. Fred and I gave Cathy and David a ride to Cathy's place. It was still snowing and her house looked like a cottage in the Black Forest, framed by tall evergreens covered in snow. Her father is a Lutheran minister and the house is attached to the church. Drove through Ira's neighbourhood, the medieval fortresses, mock Tudor and gingerbread of Hampstead. A fairy tale evening fading as a dream, a mirage.

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On Stephen's recommendation I picked up The Dream Academy album. It is wistful, haunting in places, the type of music I prefer not to follow with a lyric sheet. Knowing what the words say would spoil its magic. It is perfect for this deep dreamy snow world.

**Feb. 4**

Met Cathy, Michèle and Sally at Carlo's and Pepe's and forfeited my opportunity to be trashed by Stoneface in class. Michèle and I drank margaritas and spun a fantasy of going to a tropical country. Interesting to hear that neither Sally nor Michèle have done any more writing than I have since September. None of us has any motivation to write. Sally talked about gay friends her husband won't let her have any contact with so she has changed their names, identities and genders to deceive him. Cathy talked about how she lost weight in order to try out for cheerleading, just to live out something she had wanted to do in high school. She didn't really want to be a cheerleader but wanted to know it could be a choice. Everyone was very much themselves and the time went by far too quickly.

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Fred continuing his exploration of Judaism. We went to a lecture at Chabad House. I was disconcerted to find it is a Lubavitcher meeting place and I expected to be turned away by bearded men in black coats and hats. No one resembling that stereotype showed up. Instead, a very young Rabbi Fine talked about intentions vs deeds (or mitzvot). He talked about the smallest or grossest outer shells or vessels containing God, how God is found here on earth now, in everything that is done. Fascinating.

**Feb. 6**

First day at TPF&C. I feel like a work placement student again. It's been a long time since I've worked for anyone under supervision like this. And to have the smallest things matter so much! Such as writing with the blue pen instead of the black and drawing arrows on the communiqué. I do miss some aspects of BHCL. Fred has got a contract job word-processing at McGill. Right now we are making the same amount of money. Lots of jokes about being "contract yuppies," or "yuppies for a week."

Bev Church seems to be very competent and professional. In addition to her job at TPF&C, she is also chair of the Special Libraries Association of Montréal and is taking two correspondence courses. She is patient with me and I appreciate her positive outlook. Dawn is nice as well. The two of them work well together. There is something about Dawn's intent gaze that makes me feel ill at ease though.

## **Feb. 8**

Astrological conference at the Y. Ran into Susan. She greeted me with warmth, embraced me (I never know what to expect with her). She wanted a sneak preview of my poster, the theme being "all the world is a stage," and flip-up illustrations for the twelve houses. As I hoped, she was enchanted by it and delightedly flipped up the scenes. She put it up in a place of honour and induced people to go and look at it. No one else seemed particularly interested but I enjoyed creating it.

Even early in the afternoon the numbers of attendees far exceeded anyone's expectations. No one bargained for the concentration and interest in the lectures. I would swear some people would never rise from their seats again. Robert Phillion was there, diligently taking notes, charming everyone around him. Mary Rose arrived. I was glad to see her. The afternoon had become disjointed, people coming and going, the buzz at the back of the room threatening to overwhelm the activities, air clogged with cigarette smoke. Mary Rose and I found a more private room and we talked. As usual, it was a personal, wide-ranging talk. We examined her husband's chart and talked about our respective in-law problems. She always thinks I'm a Pisces, which makes sense considering my Neptune conjunctions in the 12<sup>th</sup> House. She said my Pluto in the 10<sup>th</sup> House at my midheaven means I have to find a career that is meaningful and all-encompassing, that I can't get away with less. My Pluto in that position won't let me take jobs that are meaningless, not indefinitely. They always come to an end. Interesting. Does this mean I will be on the rubber chicken contract circuit forever?



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Fred and I went to the Jewish Public Library to hear a Mr de Groot speak about the underground resistance movements in the Netherlands during the war. He was a very gracious man and the people stood up and thundered applause when he spoke about freedom. The night turned eerie when he showed slides of some of the propaganda of the era. The overhead lights were off, and all there was was the light of a small lamp, which illuminated his face and hands. It made me think of someone poring over an old medieval text with a lantern, looking for the secrets that will break the world apart.

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Bev and I talked personally for the first time at work. I thought I had detected a teacherly quality to her and yes, she had been a French teacher in the high school system but left because it was hopeless. The students were a zoo, the parents even worse and the administration didn't back up its teachers. I told her I had considered being an English teacher – for about five minutes. I loathed high school as a student, to spend my adult working years working in one would be suicidal. Bev is the model of someone working in the library profession; liberal, democratic, knowledgeable. The cleaners gather around her and talk. Joan Gooding whom no one else really speaks to, comes and talks to Bev.

Lunch in the Place Bonaventure passage among the briefcase brigade. A man sat across from me and I expected him to pull out a newspaper, a *Time* magazine or a Robert Ludlum book, but because it was me, he naturally pulled out the Holy Bible and started smiling at me. I wolfed down my quiche, grabbed my Orangina and took off. Sometimes I wonder if I have the words “convert me now” written on my forehead.

Looking outside from my perch on the 30<sup>th</sup> floor, the whole world is white, made of layers of fog, plumes of smoke, whirling snow. Like a Chinese painting when all becomes the heavenly world, trees and houses all but erased. And all that keeps me from falling into these clouds is the window. Starting to clear a little and I can pick out signposts, landmarks appearing in the fog like little buoys. A crooked red building emerges, then another like stranded starfish, sea creatures just learning how to take in oxygen. Buildings huddle along the waterfront.

## Feb. 5

An evening of Stephens. It started pleasantly enough. Steven Frank, Lila, Marc LeMay and I all met at Stephen Schettini's. We brought some stories to read – at Stephen's request. Most of Stephen's work this year has gone into his script-writing class. Steven Frank also brought over some home-made wine and with those two Stephens around, glasses do not remain empty for long. Good talk with Marc LeMay. He liked my blouse and the way I wear my beret. We also discovered we have things in common beyond writing, beyond Colin's class. We both wanted to completely change the educational system when we were in high school and we had a great talk about that. He seemed more personal, more vulnerable than usual tonight.

After we read our stories Marc played a cassette and it was Kate Bush's *The Hounds of Love*. I mentioned how I had written "The Aleph" to that music. Marc was impressed, said it was synchronicity. Stephen said he loved that album and played it over and over. I mentioned The Dream Academy. Turns out that was the music he listened to before Kate Bush and I said it was my favourite now.

Lila and Steven Frank left. Although I usually leave with Lila, I was hitting it off with Marc tonight and decided to stay. Stephen brought out a hash pipe and I smoked for the first time since last year – at Steven Frank's end-of-class party. I knew I shouldn't have done that. I remember that Stephen and I griped about work. We talked about writing and speculated on future directions. Stephen seems to be serious about moving to Vancouver and going to the Kootenay School of Writing. We talked a bit about religions. Marc asked Stephen which he identified more with, Buddhism or Catholicism. He said he felt he was still a Catholic. It took every thing I had to not pass out on the couch. As Marc and I prepared to leave, Stephen played the Dream Academy, which turned out to be strangely appropriate.

Marc and I walked together to the Metro and he saw me get on at Atwater. After we parted the evening became strange. I got off at Lionel-Groulx but took the wrong line and ended up down in Point St-Charles. The Metro was shut down, it was around 2 am. I really had stayed a long time at Stephen's. I was alone and my mind was still fuzzy from the hash. I intended to walk up to Atwater but ended up walking in the wrong direction, away from the station.

Cold deserted streets of warehouses, boarded windows, sullen brick. Nothing seemed real. A streetlight would highlight some strange detail, a dusty flower pot with a dead flower, a boarded house with twee Swiss shutters. Unfamiliar names of little streets that lead into industrial bridges, more Victorian warehouses. A railway track appeared in the middle of nowhere and ended again just as abruptly. It was like entering another time as well as another place. Even the street names had a turn-of-the-century feel to them; Mullin Street, Dublin. Street names I knew I had never seen before.

Walked toward the lights. Mind over matter, one foot, another foot. I crossed some sort of boundary line when I passed the Sheinart store. I knew where I was again. An all-night 105 pulled into Atwater Station and I hopped it. I, and maybe two other solitaires, were on this great cavernous rattling bus. The driver blasted the radio, fighting the phantoms as the bus rattled up and down deserted streets. I recognized Stephen's building. I had returned from the underworld.

## **Feb. 27**

Went to McGill to help Bev do some research for the company's anniversary. This entailed scrolling through back issues of "The Gazette" for the year 1956. Quite a slice! What a fantasy-land newspapers are. Every day hundreds of people are steeped solely in one bias, viewpoint, perspective. It's like putting on 3-D glasses and seeing images only when you look in one place on one screen; if you so much as turn your head, the picture goes dark.

"Reds" were an obsession, yes, here in Canada. Khrushchev is constantly referred to as "Mr K," as if he's a James Bond villain. A lot of ugly terminology and attitudes. This makes me understand why the Sixties had to happen as they did, why there was an explosion. Here, Côte St-Luc is spelled Cote St. Luke. God, that kind of pettiness and threatened rigidity makes me sick. The Fifties were death. No wonder there was rock & roll. People's attitudes do not keep pace with their technological discoveries. People still see the world from their bastions of country, race, religion, yet we keep developing more powerful weapons.

## March 1

Astrology lecture. Donna Van Toen speaking about Mars. I arrived at the Ramada Inn a little late. The ASM lecture was not listed on their event board, and after my recent misadventures, assumed I had the wrong time and place. I turned around and went home. When I checked the newsletter again I discovered that the lecture was indeed being held at the Ramada, so I set out again and made it only a bit late. When I entered the lobby, there was the ASM listing right in front of my face. How could I have missed that? I told Mary Rose about it and was relieved to learn that the Ramada had changed their sign while I was shuttling back and forth. No 12<sup>th</sup> House wormholes after all. Ghislaine overheard and told me I had to have more self-confidence. Easy enough for her to say. I wonder how often she ends up in Point St-Charles, Pie-IX or somewhere along the TransCanada! Why would you even cut in on someone's conversation to say something like that anyway?

Talked with Mary Rose about Pluto. She has been telling me that because Pluto is in my 10th House I have to find a career that will incorporate its energies and that until I do so, I won't have a real career, only jobs that don't mean very much to me and will end peremptorily. She also told me that the first day she met me she got this impression of "alone-ness" about me, as if I had an invisible circle around me, which somehow kept me apart from everyone else.

Told Susan about my job interview at Pratt & Whitney. On Wednesday I went tramping across the Siberian plains of the South Shore (during a wildcat transit strike) to get to an interview at Pratt & Whitney. It was a non-committal, inconclusive interview with a genteel Englishwoman who did not reveal any real feeling. It was also a conversational interview and not as structured as many. I don't think I do well in these types of interviews because I'm not good at small talk and I actually appreciate the structure. I told Susan about it and she advised me not to work there, that it is rigidly bureaucratic and the people there make conversation about cars and storm windows. She herself is looking for a three-day a week job where "I can put in my hours and hold my nose for a while."

#### **March 4**

Talk with Lila and Ira after class. Ira is in upheaval. She has been living in a flat on Wilder Penfield for the past week and has made two trips to the house to pick up her most needed clothes and possessions. She doesn't want to live in the same house as Charlie any more and is torn between her desire for freedom and the judgements already passed on to her by society, especially her husband, sons and friends. "Charlie will take them all," she said. For his part, Charlie is doing the time-honoured thing and bringing psychiatry into it by trying to convince Ira that she is going crazy because she feels this way. Ira has an Orthodox son in a New York yeshiva who wants to come and visit. She knows he wants to come and talk her out of her madness. Men always have the institutions on their side; religion, medical, law. Children can become desperate about keeping things exactly in place. It takes so long for a child to see a parent as a real person with their own needs.

Lila talked about her son who is living with her now, how he still carries a lot of anger toward her over the break-up of what to him was a convenient, secure family life. It is extremely difficult for the relationship because I don't think Lila has told her children about their father's molestations. For Lila, the final step in leaving was a long, painful decision and she could do it only after counselling and a lot of support.

Ira asked me if I loved Fred and I said I did. She then asked me if there had ever been a time when I felt as she does now and I gave her a whirlwind outline of the relationship with Jim and how I came close to thinking he was the person I should be with. She asked why I didn't take up with Jim and I said Fred was the one I really loved. The relationship with Jim was a fantasy. Also, I had no physical feeling for Jim.

"See," said Ira. "You couldn't live with a man you didn't love. Tell me, you're young, I want a young perspective, do you think I'm doing the right thing – would you do it?"

"Yes," I said, firmly. "I have done it. Marriage for the sake of marriage means absolutely nothing to me. I never thought I would ever be married. What's in the heart is what really matters."

“You see,” said Ira. “It’s what’s in the heart and I agree with you.. You, Lila, have been through it. What do you think?” I found out that after Lila had finally mustered the courage to leave, she discovered her husband had moved someone into the house, right away – and it galled her. Lila said she wasn’t necessarily looking for marriage but she needed to know it would be a lasting relationship. I said that for me a relationship should last as long as there is spirit and feeling. Without these, what is anything worth?

Ira playfully ordered me to find her a man: “between thirty and sixty, handsome, intelligent, charming, artistic, Jewish or not-Jewish, it doesn’t matter, as long as he doesn’t want marriage. I want something for the moment. I give you a month!” She doesn’t want anyone at Dawson College (where she and Lila both teach) to know about the separation. When Lila asked if she had a good support group Ira shook her head and said no one knew, and the ones who did disapproved. She asked us to pray for her. And then I found out that Ira had tried to leave Charlie a long time ago. She went out to Vancouver with the sons and rented, or was going to rent an apartment, but Charlie found her and brought the boys back.

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Met Michèle, Cathy and Sally at Carlos and Pepe’s. Sally, with Cathy by her side, has gone to Legal Aid to take the first steps in acquiring a divorce, citing mental cruelty. It was Cathy who helped her rummage through her husband’s files to find the right papers. Cathy accompanied her to Legal Aid. I so hope the divorce goes through and she is set free. More than that, I want her to become whole.

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Long talk with Mary Rose. Our talks are oceanic, labyrinthine. Neither of us knows what secret tunnels we will discover. Today I found out that Mary Rose met her husband, Morrie, in Vancouver. He was a musician. She met him once on the beach and was attracted to him. After that moment it seemed as if she was always meeting up with him. I told her how I first met Fred at Elrond and on the first night we met we sat in the window pod and talked until 5 a.m.

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The language of management. Some of the words and phrases used in an ordinary article about office interruptions: “interlopers, engagers, the invaded party” ... “the hallways are filled with office invaders looking for some innocent soul to besiege.” What is also interesting is all the Jewish writers in the field of Management – and use of Holocaust imagery! One of these writers compares going into the boss’s office to be fired to receiving an invitation to the gas chamber. I’m not sure what this means, if anything, but it makes me extremely uncomfortable. It also shows that Management will steal its language from all sources, and is completely amoral about how it does it.

## March 12

Another wonderful letter from Colin! It looks as if *Writing* can’t use any of the material I gave him, but it’s such a beautiful letter. I’ve been sobbing my eyes out over his kindness and – light!

“.... What first hits me in all these is the condition of light you’ve talked about, and it’s curious too because it often shines brightly and then disappears into the shadows for long periods, as in “The Aleph.” This only makes it brighter, of course, when it shines out again. As it does at the end of each of these stories.

“Structurally, each piece is similar. There is the mysterious elemental interior world in combat with the outside life on the streets. Each story concludes here when those two worlds coincide for a moment – that’s the flash of light – the Aleph point in fiction – in these stories anyway, and in real life too, when we actually join the world for an instant.

“The trick is to (I’m telling you?) intertwine them so that the mysterium shines out through the words (are they like the bars on the window, or are they the windows – and is this what you’re getting at?) I think what happens in these stories is that you as yet don’t trust your reader (as well you shouldn’t, except that I think one has to write to the most subtle and sensitive reader rather than to those who prefer to be spoon fed) and so the mysterium, the elemental is over-explained – it in fact loses its mystery. I notice throughout that you often return us to the explanation for why someone feels something rather than letting what the character says reveal her condition.

“Our minds synthesize swiftly, and can put together (from our own conniving and fearful lives) motives and purposes and sensations with no trouble most of the time. And when we don’t have enough to go on, then we can be allowed or allow ourselves to be suspended in the mystery. Then its alternating gloom/light will be recreated within us – we will dwell in it through the story, and you’ll have established a field in which to place your characters. I know this is a terribly general note, but at the moment this explanation seems to divide the two parts to each story, and they don’t always flow as they might.

“..... It must drive you crazy rewriting these stories – I’d think of trying to simplify them – not to make them simple, but to look for the mystery that only the simple can hold – these are stories of discovery, identity; try to make these the central core – it’s as if they aren’t enough, but now, they’re a little lost in the mind’s sifting and modifying. In some way are you circling around these issues rather than diving into the heart, making more complex where you could be shedding light – is the darkness something these stories want to keep in place a little bit?

“.... Please let me know how these comments strike you – and I’m open to hearing what you have to say – absolutely. You’re wrestling with big, exciting demons here and I’m impressed and say – Yay! Keep going! Keep going!

So until soon,  
Colin”

### **March 16**

Astrology discussion group at L’Herberie. A great place for such a discussion, made me feel like we were in Paris in the 20s and 30s. Ruslan Logush was there. He recently joined our little group and has proceeded to take over. He’s a name-dropper. To hear him talk you would think he was on intimate terms with Deena, Susan etc., but when Deena joined us it became clear that she barely knew who he was. Disappointed that Mary Rose wasn’t there. Robert Phillion greeted me warmly. Rus drew beautiful artistic charts group members. He also didn’t include my Sun-Mercury-Neptune square Uranus. That Uranus seems to be invisible to the world. Rus dominated the group. He argues, explained, reasoned, banged his drum. The conversation became abstract.



An Indian man named Arun talked about the importance of being “immaculate.” He has been an astrologer for 20 years and doesn’t see unique qualities in individual people any more. He talked philosophically about how nature provides just enough and that we humans are the ones who build huge thick dense walls that are not necessary. Violence, vehemence, volume instead of intensity. According to Arun, the things we carry with us from the past, or from past lives, are like walls which surround our hearts and emotions and make our reactions untrustworthy, “not immaculate.” He showed us a new way of doing charts, a new grid pattern which was quite lovely. Rus was upset because the pattern wasn’t circular. But I thought Arun had some really interesting things to say.

Deena surprised me by coming. We are two ships that pass in the night. I seem to perceive her much differently than others do. Arun talked about her warmth. Rus bandies her name about all the time, extolls her intelligence, experiments and abstractions. I think I tune in on her Capricorn-Aquarius and find the Sagittarius Sun hard to detect. With Aquarians I feel like Robert does around Geminis, slow and overlooked. That’s how I feel with Deena. Every so often she blinks at me as if wondering how I materialized. I am never quick enough to make real conversation with her, and I can feel the exact moment when she is no longer engaged, when she has stopped listening and is looking beyond me. She is perceptive, and her gaze goes in and out of focus. “You’re not so much in your Twelfth House any more,” she said to me. “I’ve seen a big difference in you this year from last year.” I’m not sure how she can say this about someone she’s hardly spoken to.

## **March 20**

Fred and I met for lunch downtown and I saw Susan Kelly. She joined us and we had a good time talking about work, the corporate image. She told me the ASM executive members were having photos taken and she invited me. We joked about showing up in Groucho Marx noses and moustaches. She asked me if I had gone to L’Herberie on Tuesday and what it had been like. “Well,” I said, “It was a diverse group of people, like people from various subgroups who did not really connect.” She said she was not a “joiner.”

She was not afraid to express her opinion of Rus and it was the same as mine. Deena must have described the evening for her. I had a great time telling BHCL stories and was late getting back to the office up in the clouds. I love telling BHCL stories to astrologers – all of that fixed energy uniting against a bad, irrational boss. Susan embraced me warmly and told Fred, “I like Lesley.” Her sense of humour sparkles, her tongue often sharp, her wit keen.

### **March 22 weekend**

Visit from Marsha. She met me downtown and found the Bonaventure passage as depressing as I do. She told me that John is intrigued by me. He says I have a helpless appearance. She told him that I usually know exactly what I’m doing and where I’m going and he is intrigued by these contradictions.

Made it to the apartment and after Fred came in from work, the three of us prepared food. Marsha opened the conversation about Sharon and the floodgates opened. She has taken Sharon’s silence deeply to heart, to the point where I think she is tormenting herself over it. Her talk of Sharon became this stream-of-consciousness monologue about Sharon and Marsha’s relationship past-present-future. At times I was reminded of a heart-breaking comedy routine. She can switch instantly from grief, wounded vulnerability, humour to a kind of philosophical rationalism.

Something that intrigued me was the similarity between Marsha’s description of Sharon as a “malignant force,” “ice queen,” “some force that could decimate an entire gathering of people,” and Jim Mills’s talk of Sharon, “an ice-cold exterior with a blue flame inside.” Sharon as a fairy-tale archetype, some kind of nemesis. Marsha also described Sharon as “living inside a prism which throws off only Sharon’s own reflection.” These very archetypal views of Sharon whereas I mostly find her a good companion.

Marsha talked about how important friendship is to her, how all she needs to know is that people love her, ever since her mother died when she was a small child. At the cottage she told this to Sharon and Sharon said that she loved Marsha. No wonder that visit had so drained Marsha. Yet, I also detected manipulation in the spiel, the frame of the natural-born storyteller.

I started to wonder if she had come here to pump me for information as to how Sharon had reacted to Marsha's letter. She wondered if Sharon wasn't some kind of sickness, an attraction of opposites. Marsha is always fighting someone or something. If it isn't her father it's a Sharon-like figure who casts some kind of authority over her. And I don't think it's just her family who disapproves of her living with John. How many couples do I know who live together without being married? Dave and Claire, Bev and Giles, Tom Wilson and Joan, André and Chantal, etc, etc. Yet to hear Marsha talk, you'd think she and John are the first couple to ever do this and are disrupting the structure of society.

Saturday night, Marsha's friend Terry Murphy joined us. Terry is a sexy man with a face that looks just a little weathered. He seems to be interested in a wide variety of subjects and I think we made a good foursome. We went to the Castillo for dinner and Carlos was at the top of his form. Marsha was impressed by the food and this restaurant was the one thing I knew I had got right this weekend.

Went from there to the Vieux Dublin. Went upstairs and drank strange beers. A fold-singer was performing downstairs and the radio was on upstairs, which made me feel a little schizoid. Marsha commented on how there were three Sagittarians at the table; she, Fred and Terry Murphy. Ya'acov was at the Vieux Dublin playing darts, and Fred went off to join him.

Ya'acov and Kayla eventually left. On their way out, Kayla came up to me, her eyes partially shut and apologized for having been too tired to come over and talk to me. "She was plastered," said Terry. No, it was an act. I make her very uncomfortable. She never knows what to do, greet me, join me, talk to me, so she exaggerated her fatigue to get out of the awkward encounter. I do the exact same things myself.

Sunday morning we lingered in our pyjamas for most of the morning and then to the Croissant de lune. Again, Sharon. Marsha gestured, wailed and it all came out again, this amazing outpouring. We drove Marsha to Gare Centrale, dodging the potholes. Entered through a passage in an office building and found ourselves in a 2001 setting. Two or three levels, all in tinted glass, mirrors, reflecting lights connected by escalators, constantly ascending, descending. "It's just like Sharon's ice caverns," Marsha said, and we descended into these ice regions, seeing our reflections splitting off a million times, full-faced, in profile, while the railings gleamed in steel and chrome, studded with little golden lights.

No vault, no bottom, no walls, no return. Only our reflections, our images repeating themselves. Space and light but a dead vacuum of space and light. You could not be cold nor warm here. Food would be dispensed in tubes through a glass panel in the wall. Saw Marsha off. She hadn't really come to visit us – she had come to exorcise Sharon. Fred and I returned to the street, ascending out of the ice caverns.

### **March 25**

Met Lila on the 105 bus today and I mentioned Anaïs Nin. Lila has heard Anaïs Nin speak once, at McGill, remembers her as being tiny, delicate with a soft-spoken but elegant voice. Lila remembers having read some of her work and finding the imagery beautiful, exotic and interior. We arrived at Concordia early and we had coffee and continued our talk. I don't remember what we talked about but we ended up being late for class, and that talk was by far the best part of the night.

Punchy class. We had to fill out teacher evaluation forms. God was scribbling away and Jeff Kahan, whose work is routinely denigrated, said, "Why don't you read what you've written so we can criticize your writing style." Lila and I looked at each other and laughed. God has decided he likes her "down-home" stories and defends all the wrong things in them. He defended a scene in her last story because he had once almost drowned and read all kinds of qualities into the scene that weren't there, or even intended. He likes Lila's work because they are both from the Maritimes. I teased Lila about having God's grace shining upon her.

We discussed Steven Frank's story, "Baglady's Bag," and God pronounced judgment upon it. This time Jeff Kahan was irrepressible. He said, "You know Glenn, you always have a way of making people feel good when you criticize something. You really encourage people to go on." Everyone laughed – well at least, Jeff, Steven, John, Lila and I laughed. God and Stoneface just sat there, completely expressionless. At first glance, God seems like a jovial character, an avuncular down-home kind of man dressed in plaid shirts and gardening pants. His fingers twitch constantly, however, revealing a nervous tension that seems to come out in his critiques.

Steven's stories this year have often served as catalysts for long discussions on the nature of reality vs reality, meaning, symbolism. I know Steven is breaking through to new territory and he isn't quite comfortable with his material yet. I like that uncertainty and the way he listens and absorbs what others have to say. At the end of class, most of us were still clustered around Scott. Ira ordered him to take out a notepad and pen. She printed mathematical puzzles in great big Russian-looking numbers for Scott to solve. He couldn't, and we laughed as Ira added the one stroke of the pen that completed the equation. Then she winked, smiled her Scheherazade smile and was on her way.

### **March 26**

End of TPF&C contract. Pasta lunch and wine with Bev and Dawn as a thank-you for helping them out. Bev said she knew I had got the most tedious jobs. We talked about travelling. Bev loves travelling, mingling with people in the marketplaces. She has travelled all over Europe, Greece, has lived in France and London for a few months, Africa for a year or two. When I grow up I want to be like Bev.

I find her a little bit difficult to relate to on a personal level, though. Our talk is always general, usually to do with work, travel or sometimes an item in the news. She has a strong teacherly quality and she tends to take over and do everything herself, not always giving me the time to find my own way. She tends to instruct, lecture, advise, encourage, and help rather than "just" talk. But I think the contract went well and she was a great supervisor.

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A "Gazette" salesman called, trying to sell me a subscription by telling me it is "the only English newspaper in Montréal." I said in response, "I don't speak that kind of English."

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ASM meeting at Deena's. Deena is different in her own home than she is at meetings. Somewhat flighty and impersonal in public, at home her door is open, the interior warm and homey. She listened to me when I mentioned some concerns members have expressed to me through the cassette tape club. Many, especially newcomers, feel excluded and alienated. Deena listened and then she described what the ASM has done to try getting people involved. They spent a lot of time tonight arranging an event to bring everyone together. Deena is going to hold a general meeting/wine and cheese party, which I think is a great idea.

André was so different tonight. Bubbling with hokes and humour. Serious André regaled us with tales of his racetrack escapades. He also said he couldn't stand (strong words for André) people like Michel Morin who come here from France and arrogantly condescend to the astrologers here when they themselves have nothing to add.

Lise said she didn't belong to the ASM to socialize. There must be a purpose to what she does. She wants to work with other astrologers and that is the only important thing for her. Lise's practicality is a nurturing one, though, not limited or punitive. I can easily see her as an actress with her expressive face, dramatic gestures. I'm not sure when her divorce took place, but there is pain in her eyes when she talks about relationships. In fact, she is doing research on relationships, collecting charts to create composites.

Fred arrived with his camera to take the "executive photos." Susan and I had kept it a secret so no one would shy away and so it would be spontaneous. Everyone was good-humoured about it and we had quite a merry time posing for these photos. I especially enjoyed the one where we are standing as if in a police identification line-up.

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Got the ASM photos back from Astral. They are interesting, revealing. Fred managed to capture our real personalities. Susan Kelly looks complex; shy, sharp, highly strung with that intense almost threatening undertone all at once. Lise's photos are amazing. There are four of them and her expressions are all completely different. She looks like a great tragic actress, her feelings shining through all the poses.

André is not photogenic. Usually he alternates between looking pale and ghoulish to looking like a thug! A real puckish sense of humour has started to emerge in him, and I liked the photo of him looking deadly, like he has returned from the dead as the ultimate act of revenge. Deena's photos are also revealing. One bright, warm and pleasant, and another that is almost identical except that her smile has slackened and her eyes have lost attention and interest.

Fred and I delivered the photos to Susan at her apartment. Up a long long narrow curving staircase. We sat in Susan's Dostoyevskian kitchen and looked over the photos. I like her insights and observations of people. She mentioned the emotion radiating from Lise's face. While we talked Susan's black cat slunk in and out the window and a neighbour's cat came in and curled up in her lap.

## **April 6**

Rainy Saturday, astrology meeting at RCMP headquarters. This was one of our most successful meetings, more direction and structure than usual – and no Rus. Donna Kowalczyk, a triple Earth sign, came out and I think we benefitted from her sense of structure. She seemed to anchor the group. Louise Campbell and I talked about being apolitical and how the only way to change the world is by changing ourselves, and especially our perceptions of the world. The only way to change ourselves is by recognizing the hurt, shame, fear that governs our actions and so often delivers us to sociopathic leaders.

Mary Rose talked about her parents-in-law who are both in the hospital. This opened up a whole new conversational path. We discovered that Mary Rose is married to Morrie, who is originally from Israel, and his parents have been nothing but a trial to MR. There's Fred and his wealthy snobbish mother. Louise is a Catholic who married an Anglican man, and has a similar problem. I asked Mary Rose about Morrie and she said he is very serious, has a lot of religious feeling, majored in Theology at university. His feeling about his mother is impersonal on the surface, but much repressed anger and hurt on the inside. There is much tenderness in Morrie, however. He treats her well and MR never criticizes him harshly. She speaks of him as her "fated and great love."

## April 15

The class with Scott and company ended on a good note. Steven Frank has been one of my great supporters all year. One week he told me he thought I was really tuning in and getting somewhere, especially because he didn't get the story the first time he read it, and he can always tell when something is good when he doesn't understand it the first time around. I understand that completely and agree wholeheartedly. Tonight he came in and exclaimed, "Good story!" ("Practicing Deceit")

"Thank you," I said.

"I was talking about Glen's story. I couldn't finish yours."

"Well then, on Glen's behalf I thank you."

He told me all the things he liked about it. His family has a cottage at Stowe and he said I had described the mountains and the light perfectly. I said I was afraid I had rambled a lot in this work. "I liked those ramblings," said Steven. "They were my favourite parts of the story."

He praised the story in class, especially that there was no resolution at the end. He said a revelation at the end would have been too predictable, wrapping everything up in just another short story ending. Steven won Scott over to the ending with his interpretation. Scott also liked the story and said it showed "an abundance of talent!"

God finally turned in a long story and it sounded very much like him. The story was called "Self-Portrait" and was about a pompous professor. Some of it was amusing but great chunks of it were ... pompous. Ponderous, predictable, sprinkled with stupid middle-aged jokes. Scott even came out and said so. God, of course, defended himself against all criticism. It was because we were obtuse that we didn't get what he wanted to portray.

After class we gathered in the hall. Scott told us we had been the best class he ever had in terms of productivity and critical acumen. He urged us all to take writing classes next year, any writing class, just to ensure we have the discipline and structure to keep going. Scott sees writing as being a yoke, something that requires a lot of hard work and discipline. He works in sections, meticulously writing and writing small sections until they are perfect before placing them in a whole. Me, I tend to slap words on a page hoping something will stick.



Lila and I left for the bus together, both with questions about the future. I mentioned to her that I often doubt how much commitment I really have toward writing as being anything other than a hobby, something I enjoy doing the way other people enjoy puzzles or Scrabble, etc. Lila has a way of asking penetrating questions and looking straight at you with her keen blue eyes. “Then why do you keep circling around the field, so attracted to it, taking courses etc.?”

I shrugged and said, “I wish I knew. I have as little awareness as any of my characters. When I’m asked what something means in one of my stories I hardly ever know what’s going on myself, so how can my characters.”

Lila laughed. She talks a lot about my intelligence and sharp wit – but if I have either, it’s because she brings those qualities out of me. I find her intelligent, witty and stimulating. She opens the doors to so many interesting subjects. Actually, I suspect I take the classes just so I can keep contact with people I really like, such as her, Steven, the group from Colin’s class. I’m not good at making friends and being in a loose association such as a class or the ASM is a much more comfortable social place for me.

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I forgot to mention that I ran into Joe Colasurdo in the lobby of 800 Dorchester. He looked the same, dressed in a pinstripe suit, friendly expression, fragrant after-shave, perfect grooming. We shook hands and greeted each other with pleasant surprise. He was happy (and impressed) to hear I was working upstairs at TPF&C and he said it was a beautiful office. He is working across the street at Place Ville Marie. The big news: Howard finally had enough and left BHCL. He is going to McGill to get a degree “to do anything, anything else.” Joe thinks Richard may have been a good influence on him. Richard had been urging Howard to leave. Joe described how bad BHCL had become, the paltry contracts it was winning. He shook his head and said, “It could have made of go of it ...” Neither of us needed to say more.

Shortly after this meeting I called BHCL to get a phone number for Howard as he is one of my references. Talked with Mary for a while. Only she, Nicole, Kevin and Bob are currently in the office. Talked with Kevin. No change with him either. Good to hear his voice and we made each other laugh. He had just been speaking with Howard that very morning. Howard did indeed leave. He put everything in order, cleaned out his desk and figured he had gone as far as he could go. Kevin says he still has somewhere to go in his job yet, so no change with him. He laughed when I told him I had seen Jimmy, or was it Jerry, Jeffcott at the Ya'acov Smirnoff show at Club Soda. Wow. It sounded so depressing. What does Kevin do for lunch these days? Where on earth can he still be going in that job? Jeffcott will continue to blame the government, the banks, the employees, other companies, etc. He will never learn anything.

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Called Sharon. I'm very glad I did call because apparently I had written in my last letter that I would call. Time flew by as it always does and meanwhile, she waited for this promised phone call. She did say she is still feeling paranoid after receiving Marsha's letter. She is preparing her response to the letter but I see little hope for reconciliation. I fear Sharon has decided to be unforgiving and cut off this living warm connection for cold pride. She is also very upset and angry that Marsha told me about the letter and referred to Marsha's "blatting." She also said she doesn't think she will ever hear from Marsha again.

Sharon's application for Master of Education at OISE was unexpectedly turned down. She visited Prescott and eventually told her family the news. Her step-mother Betty said in her blunt way that Sharon didn't have it that bad off and others she knew were in worse situations. Sharon did not take this well. She said, "Now that was the thing I really needed to hear. I was going to visit there on the next long weekend but I'm not going now!" I'm worried that Sharon is cutting everyone off, blocking all of her life lines. I still think she alienated Marsha until Marsha was compelled to make a break. Now Sharon can tell everyone that Marsha has abandoned her, has sent her a cruel letter in the middle of her bereavement.

Now that Marsha is out of her life, she no longer talks about leaving Toronto. She has completely reversed her feelings about living there. Now she talks about how convenient it is to live in a city with all the people and connections she has made there. But I am worried about Sharon. It reminds me of Richard the III, where the king eventually finds himself alone, isolated, trapped in a little box having alienated everyone around him. It was a tough phone call. Am utterly drained.

### **April 27**

Went to see *Dark Lullabies* at Cinema V with Lila and her sixteen year-old daughter Vanessa. A couple of people had told Lila the movie wasn't very good, but I think that depends on how you perceive it. It is a very personal film, an attempt by film-maker Irene Lilienheim Angelico to come to terms with the past, to try and retrieve some kind of meaning. I thought it was an absorbing exploration of the second generation of Holocaust survivors, how these children were shaped by their parents' experiences. There was old footage in there I had never seen before, including footage of someone being slid into an oven. Some scenes stood out for me: Elie Wiesel speaking to a convention of Holocaust survivors in Israel with soldiers carrying guns, walking around in the background.

Angelico's quest eventually led her to Germany and you could feel the complexity of emotions; attraction, revulsion, the apprehension and suspicion she felt every time she looked into the face of a German of her parents' generation. That segment reminded me strongly of the Walter Abish story about a man returning to Germany, to a suburb that had been rebuilt over a concentration camp. Collusion of silence, repression. Everywhere she went people did not know, had not been around at the time.

She also encountered young Germans, second generation of the Nazis, who were questioning their past. These scenes were deeply moving. One young woman cried when she talked about what her grandfather had done, how she had to strengthen herself so she could live according to her own values and not what she had been brought up with. To me, this is the real, true individualization and it is not easy and it is not a matter of buying commodities – including some systems of astrology.

Another young woman talked about how much she hated her father and all he stood for, but she admitted the things he taught were too deeply ingrained for her to completely lose them. Her father would show her pictures of Jews and say, “There’s a Jew, this is what Jews look like. Sometimes Jews don’t always look like Jews but something always gives them away so don’t be fooled.” So even now, hating her father and his world, she still picks out people and says to herself, “That’s a Jew.” She doesn’t do this with any other people.

Up the mountains to Hitler’s “Eagle’s Nest” in Berchtesgaden. This is now a tourist site, which attracts thousands of people. Inside, a little booth sells brochures. Angelico interviewed the young woman who publishes the booklet. She consented to give the interview only on condition that negative questions not be asked. She selected particular photos of Hitler for the brochure (with children, reading a newspaper, etc) because they “showed his human side, that he was not a monster but an ordinary human being. People like seeing this side to him, his kindness to children, his love of music.” She pointed to a photo of Eva Braun and said she had been a “nice little girl in love, and all she wanted was to get married. Finally they did and wasn’t that nice?” When asked about the concentration camps her voice become steely, resistant. “That has all been exaggerated. Yes, there were the bad things but the only reason why they are the only things that are being talked about is because Germany lost the war.”

The film-maker interviewed some neo-Nazis, if you can call it an interview. They were robots mouthing slogans, platitudes, no individual thought anywhere behind their programming. Empty eyes. They laughed at “The Holocaust” TV show because “they got the uniforms wrong. Angelico asked a particularly brittle blond man, “If your superior officer gave you an order you thought was wrong what would you do?” The man answered without hesitation. “There would be no question of that because a superior would have thought it all out and he wouldn’t give an order that was wrong.” Wow.

The last words came from Angelico: “In a way the Jews are luckier. This tragedy brings you closer to your own people. You are united on it. There is somewhere for you to go, people to share the burden. But for a German who asks questions and starts trying to uncover the past – it separates him from his people. There is nowhere to go, nowhere to put that burden, no one to share with. You lose your people, your history.”

After the movie Lila invited me to her house for tea, where we talked about prejudice of all types. She teaches a course called “Prejudice” and she gets the feeling from her students that certain attitudes and prejudices are acceptable as long as you didn’t go too far. She talked about her brother-in-law and his jokes about “Hitler having missed one.” I mentioned Sally’s story about the teenagers in New Brunswick who were having fun pretending they were Nazis hunting Jews from a hay wagon. She was not making any kind of statement; she was describing an idyllic summer day! I hope she isn’t oblivious enough to hand this story in to her creative writing teacher, Seymour Blicher. Lila herself is from New Brunswick and she says that sort of prejudice is endemic there, deeply ingrained and part of what she herself grew up with. Another thing she was brought up with was prejudice against Catholics.

Also found out that Lila has travelled all over the world. She mentioned having been to Prague a couple of times. She has lit candles in a Buddhist temple and mentioned knowing a couple of Buddhists who were as narrow-minded as anyone else. I also discovered that Ira is upset with Lila. Ira ran into Marc LeMay on the bus and Marc mentioned her separation. Ira said, “Who told you? Who told you that?” Marc told her it was Lila and Lila hasn’t heard from her since that time. “But, Lila said, “I didn’t think it would be a harmful thing to do. I had felt we were such a close group we could tell each other practically anything.” I think I may have told Cathy or Michèle.

The movie and talk with Lila made me think about prejudice, about judgments we pass on people. Even just on a mundane level. Are they inevitable? Everyone is caught up in it. Marsha talks a lot about judgment – her church background often comes out in a stern manner. The first vision of the world is through one particular lens. Is there any way out of this perspective? Can these deep rooted values, judgments, prejudices ever be purged from the heart, from those depths that lie inside everyone, like the secret well in the middle of the desert. Why do our brains seem so unchanged, always concealing sea monsters, ceolecanths.

## **April 29**

I heard the news today, oh boy. Nuclear melt-down at Chernobyl in the Ukraine, far worse than the near-miss at Three Mile Island. The Soviets built those reactors in two years. They have no safety features, no huge containment buildings. Also, since they are made of graphite there is nothing to mute the fire. What chills me most are the bleak black and white photos of the site itself, which look like the dreams I've had of concentration camps. The aerial photos showing the red spots and the map depicting the cloud of radiation – the region around Minsk coloured in white. Belarus; the “Breadbasket of the Ukraine.”

One of these paralyzing flashes when you stop, you feel life is suspended; something important has just occurred, and everyone else in the world has also stopped in the same weird suspension. And still the tired old corrupt governments. Official Soviet releases put the death toll at two, which apparently is their standard disaster figure. Why even bother releasing this over and over again. The US has it at a possible 2,000. Fred thinks this will mark the end of the nuclear industry. I wonder what the effect will be on the Soviet bloc itself. Poland is openly distributing iodine to its citizens and advising pregnant women and small children to stay indoors. I somehow suspect these actions are not encouraged in Moscow. Too revealing.

## **May 2**

Ran into Sally, Cathy and David Gosselin on the corner near Cheap Thrills. Cathy exclaimed, “Hey – imagine running into someone in Montréal!” They were on their way to Concordia pick up Sally's creative writing final portfolio. Sally looks great. She has lost a lot of weight, which emphasizes her deep brown eyes. The good news is she has just moved into a new apartment right downtown on Lincoln Street, and I am sure Cathy was behind her all the way. We had a lively talk on the corner. Cathy teased Sally about the monarchy (Sally is a royalty-nut) and talked in a phony English accent. Cathy says she is against the monarchy. Sally talked about having people come over to her new apartment. I can't remember all we talked about but we stood there for over half an hour.

## May 4

Carolyn, Donna K and Mary Rose came over to our apartment for astrology discussion. Robert is still sick. I spoke to him over the phone this week and he has abdominal pains. He's been vomiting and can't sleep at night. The doctors aren't sure what's wrong. The most recent hypothesis is that he has an infection. Rus is celebrating his Ukrainian Easter and couldn't come. I was interesting in what he might have to say about Chernobyl. Historical events is an area of astrology where he does show some insight. We ended up having a good long talk.

Donna had worked out our Black Moon, or Lilith position in our charts. It is an intriguing facet. The imagery of the Black Moon is rich and deep, reminiscent of the Aleister Crowley Tarot deck. Where it is in the chart is the area where one must learn individuality or die. Lilith is the dark feminine counterpart to Mars and can be castrating. But it is what you have to do in order to collect your karma. If you come to terms with it you are forever protected in the area which contains Lilith. Something you fear until you act it out. Lilith seems to fit with other themes in the chart. For most of us it seems as if it is found where there is already an active or key theme in the chart. Again, to me it just shows the really tight-woven redundancy of the system.

My Black Moon is located at 15 degrees Pisces, which reflects Sun-Mercury-Neptune in the 12<sup>th</sup> House. A Black Moon in Pisces denotes a need to detach from the collective unconscious. I can't act out the collective in religion or anything else. Not to identify with any large movement. It is the best position for psychology because of its emotional structures. "Will destroy other people's emotional structures." I certainly see the detachment, the inability to join large movements, my skepticism of religion. I guess rejecting these collectives could be seen as an attack of people's emotional structures. I think the one thing that gets people the most is choosing not to have children on principle. That does seem to really get at people's emotional structures.

Carolyn's is in Capricorn. She also has her Moon there. She has a problem with Moon in Capricorn – so do I, for that matter. Her Lilith says you must be one's own authority and build your own system. "I'll destroy the system that hurts me." Carolyn thought about it and decided she could see this in herself.

She works at Ville Marie Social Services and often comes butts heads with the system. Many times she feels she knows her clients and their needs better than her bosses do, and she feels the frustration of paper work delays, bureaucratic orders, etc. She talked a bit about her job, how manipulative and demanding her clients can be. She has learned how to be stronger, to tell them to call her back after they have calmed down.

Someone thought she must be a student social worker because she looks so young and fresh – not burned out. Carolyn has found inner strength through meditation. One of her clients has threatened to do voodoo on her when she returns to Haiti. We urged Carolyn to keep meditating! Donna asked Carolyn who the worst people were to deal with and I admired Carolyn's diplomatic and deflective response. I disliked Donna's question and the leading way in which it was asked. I have a feeling she wanted to hear her own thoughts on the matter corroborated by Carolyn and Carolyn stepped away from the trap.

We talked about Chernobyl. People are affected and influenced by it in much the same insidious way as the radioactivity itself penetrates everything around it. Carolyn dreamed about the radiation cloud. I admitted that I had told Fred I wanted cyanide pills to swallow in case of a nuclear emergency so I would not have to live through the fall-out.

## **May 6**

Went to pick up my portfolio. Scott wrote: "I've enjoyed your work all year, and your presence in the class. Your work is very strong, and I hope you'll keep it up. Give some thought to applying to the Master's programme; you would, I'm sure, be a most welcome addition. Whatever you decide, know that you have considerable talent and abilities. Best wishes for your future work, Scott."

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To Concordia again to inquire about the Master's program. I was given all kinds of forms. Saw all kinds of bound theses, stories by Scott Lawrence, Terence Byrnes, Sharon Sparling. Wrote to Colin and Mr Alchuk for references.



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Met Cathy and David in the student lounge. Cathy was writing a letter to try and get a professor to accept a late essay so she could continue in the program. Conversations with these two are exciting because you never know where they will lead. Cathy says what is on her mind with few inhibitions. We talked about phallic symbols in advertisements, how her female profs don't like her but the males always let her get away with everything. David has a level penetrating gaze and likes to delve beneath the surface. He likes the psychological and loves to observe people. He also has a moral streak and speaks probingly, searchingly and with great sincerity. He is staying at Cathy's house for the summer.

### **May 10**

Party at Sally's new place, a one-room downtown right near Concordia. (Cathy, David, Michèle, Fred and me.) It is full of souvenirs, gifts, mementoes of friends and family. She told me last year that her husband wanted to decorate their apartment in an ultra-modern style, full of chrome as in a magazine spread, and that she herself prefers wood furniture and intimate decor. Well, she has it now. There is a framed photo of her childhood home in New Brunswick. A fascinating photo of a smiling, serious-eyed Sally dressed in a suit and tie standing with her parents (she is an only child). She is still deeply interested in writing.

At first Sally seems friendly, extraverted, but I'm starting to feel she is actually very nervous around people, even when her husband is not in the picture. She is obviously most comfortable with Cathy. There is great sympathy in Sally and a surprising depth of understanding at unexpected moments.

Cathy looks like the stereotypical cheerleader from the early 1960s, dressed in shorts with her long blond hair pulled back, held in place by a hair band. But appearances are deceiving. Her honest, unselfconsciousness and sense of humour offsets all that. We all laughed when she said she watched the Whitney Houston video over and over again but Whitney never once looked at her. She punctuates her conversation with, "Do you know what I mean?"

Cathy questions everything, often groping for the right words to describe complex feelings. She is never complacent. She talked about how much she loved playing with Barbie dolls and how her father was disgusted with her. Sally, on the other hand, always received Barbie dolls as presents from her parents and had an entire set of accessories. Sally hated Barbie dolls and pretended to like them so she wouldn't hurt their feelings.

Michèle's observations about people are insightful. She was stood up tonight. I can't imagine how anyone could stand Michèle up. The man she was going to date tonight wanted to go another party. Michèle wanted to come here and so, came here alone. She is feeling a lot of pressure from her family to be successful, to get a good job and make him a lot of money. Her brother is leading that charge. She had to write him a letter and tell him she was not interested in making money and a job has to mean something to her. She has a close tie with her mother and they are going to indulge themselves together on Mother's Day. I can't even imagine this.

After the party ended, David, Cathy, Michèle, Fred and I stood around for ages in the warm breeze, seemingly reluctant to part company. Music was coming from one of the iron balconies in the neighbourhood. Finally we gave Michèle a ride to her new apartment, which is right across from Snowdon Metro. She is planning to have everyone over for a reading.

### **May 13**

At Ya'acov's prompting, Fred and I went to a service at the synagogue on Bailly Road. We were amazed by the rabble. Seating was segregated between men and women, but it was so chaotic it didn't bother me the way I thought it would. A people of so many laws are so lawless. Ceaseless voices, movement. A chemical reaction when they get together, the bubbling and fermentation never ends. Prayers like the buzzing of bees, everyone a cell of humming, chanting, reciting, praying as if everyone was clutching a completely different book.

Adrift in the woman's section I thought I was following along all right – although the women didn't seem to do much of anything. Except for a young woman beside me, dressed in white with a lace kippa on her head. She hummed, sang and swayed with the prayer book. Everyone else (not just me) seemed to have enough on their hands trying to figure out where we were. I had to look at the pattern to make sure I was holding the book right side up, flipping the pages from right to left. The service became even more chaotic. Spotted Fred sitting by himself, blond and isolated, but he looks good in a kippa. Some turned to face Jerusalem, some didn't. Others just greeted friends. When the woman beside me squeezed past for the fourth time I accidentally bonked my seat. She shushed me.

The cantor's voice sounded like an ancient instrument, an undertone, a long sinuous sea-sound. Also wonderful, the dialogue between the cantor and the rabbi, especially when the voices merged as one voice and the question, the response, the spirit and the earth were united. Sounds, echoes, reverberations throughout the rabbi's talk as well. He spoke about hearing the sound of footsteps echoing off the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, each sound becoming nearer and nearer. To him, they sounded like the approaching footsteps of the messiah.

Turns out this was a special service for Israel and there was a guest speaker. The speaker asked an old rabbi if he thought this was the pre-messianic age. The reply was, "Since the messiah hasn't come yet, this is certainly the pre-messianic age." The speaker projected that haunting idealism that always seems to surround talk of Israel. He thanked everybody for contributing to Israel, visiting Israel, praying for Israel. A chorus of young children sang, some wearing t-shirts that said, Israel Is Real, and the emotion was certainly real. The speaker from Israel concluded by saying he had a special thank-you for everybody deep in his heart but couldn't tell it to us until we were all on the Other Side.

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Called Scott Lawrence to ask for his reference, He was pleased to hear I'm applying for the Master's program. He said he thought that the program would do me a lot of good and I could do a lot of good for the program; it would be a good partnership. He gave me useful tips on courses I should take and advised I leave the creative writing workshop until second year after I have had time to absorb the new ideas I would get through the class work.

He said I was the best in both his classes, and “Deceit” and the rewrite of “Jerusalem” were solid pieces of work. He had the idea all through “Deceit” that he was in good hands, that I really knew what I was doing. He felt I have found and developed my own authentic voice which is half the battle right there.

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Received an *FCA Journal* and a copy of *Directions*, the newsletter which Susan is editing. She also has an article in The Fraternity News, which was a pleasant surprise. It is called “Pluto Love,” and is an in-depth analysis of Bizet’s “Carmen.” Most of the articles in this journal are pleasant, well-meaning but not particularly deep or well-written. Susan’s article is both. I do get a little tired of the shallowness and pseudo-spirituality of so many in astrological organizations. Lately my relationship to astrology in general has been prickly and skeptical. Of course, with a Mars in Libra in the 11<sup>th</sup> House I put out energy to make relationships and find groups to join only to fight and rebel against them once I’m in.

### **May 16-17**

Nancy Hastings weekend. Friday night talk on the progressed moon, all of the games we get caught up in, and how to find the way out. She is an interesting person. She has Neptune on the Ascendant and appears to be rather befuddled, but she is a Capricorn with a heavy Saturn emphasis. Her speech and approach are direct and earthy. She becomes very intense over minor things and her laugh often erupts erratically. I, and many other people liked her approach very much and found it refreshing. She has a sharp knowledge of the planets and their aspects and has the ability to synthesize. Lise Simard, no slouch herself, was very impressed and said this was how she herself wanted to practice astrology.

Hastings’s talk on Saturday was on “Fear of Success.” This talk focused on inconjunct aspects in charts and how they can form invisible impediments to success. Her attitude is, “Why do want to be poor? What is wrong with developing your inner self – and being successful at the same time?” It’s a refreshing attitude in this kind of group.

I'm starting to become aware of the pressures and internal messages a group like this gives out. When I hear people talking about their new cars or any other acquisition I am generally bored out of my gourd. When Sally Murray's husband talked about writers being stupid or useless to society, it was rude and annoying.

But you do know where these people are coming from and they are easy to avoid. But in a group of astrologers, which is now so co-opted by New Age practices and thought, the message is more insidious. Be tolerant and generally pleasant to and about everyone. Above all be spiritual. Be more-spiritual-than-thou. No one wants to hear about how you grub around for filthy lucre. And most of these people are way wealthier than I am. Mary Rose and I had lunch together and we talked about my entering the Master's program. I was concerned about the expense and she said it was my Moon in Capricorn that made me want to cling to financial security. "No," I said. "It's my bank book that's doing all the clinging."

MR and I had a delightful walk though. I do love the child-like Mary Rose who points things out with such curiosity. We peered in the windows at the Concordia art department, and we stood and sniffed the cedar wood air at a freshly built patio. We then decided to go along to Deena's for a drink. Mary Rose and Deena seem to bring out the worst in each other. Deena said it was just as well that Mary Rose was moving to Alberta. Mary Rose said that Deena seems to snub her and rub her the wrong way. In groups, Mary Rose takes on this fussy, overly solicitous persona. She often talks incessantly. It doesn't matter what kind of transit anyone is going through, Mary Rose will cut in with something worse. Unfortunately, people don't see the side of Mary Rose I do when we walk together.

Deena served us wine and cheese. Conversation was desultory, boring. Not sure why I decided to go to dinner with them, especially since my pal Mary Rose went home. Maybe I had enjoyed Nancy Hastings's talk and hoped to see more of her. I went with Lise and Danielle. Lise and I talked about work. I admire Lise. She had been sent to boarding school at an early age and has always taken on adult responsibilities. She has a great need to be responsible, efficient and nurturing. Her face is expressive, often proud or dramatic.

We all met up at an Italian food place on Prince-Arthur. Loud, crowded, claustrophobic. I couldn't hear what anyone was saying. At first I leaned forward and tried to keep up, but after a while I could feel myself drifting away. Then my head started to pound the way it sometimes did in Mr Alchuk's class. I turned completely inward, my ears roaring like conch shells. It was Deena who took me outside and revived me with glasses of water. When I went back inside, Nancy Hastings put her hand on the back of my head and said, "Your chakra is open."

Deena drove Susan and me home after the dinner, which was a typically generous thing for her to do. While driving up St-Laurent Susan made amusing comments about the influx of neon signs and silly names. We passed a Chasidic fruit store where everything they had, from fruit to mops, were stuffed into the window. "They're not big on display," said Susan. I so enjoy the acerbic quality in some of her observations. It's refreshing after being around so many people competing for the title of most spiritual. We passed through at least three completely contrasting areas to get to my place. The Greek and Portuguese neighbourhoods with the round sensual Orthodox churches, which look as if they were carved out of soap stone. One of the larger churches was having an opening-day celebration. Tents were set up, a street blocked up, an enormous brightly lit Christ and Virgin scene. Past the colourful buildings with lush flower gardens to Sherbrooke Street near McGill, with the elegant grey and opaline buildings.

Now leafy tunnels through Westmount with the great stone houses built like fortresses buried in gardens. The Westmount passage ends when the street lines end. Fred and I joke about falling off the edge of the world when we leave the marked streets of Westmount and head into unmarked NDG. Beyond the pale. I warn Deena about the "Bermuda Corner" where all the accidents occur. The street then opens up into that scrubby park and a polyglot of people. The Caribbean restaurant, yuppies and out-patients. Felt like I had gone on a voyage through Montréal in 40 minutes.

## May 19

Went to Deena's for my reading with Nancy Hastings. It was literally a dark and stormy night. Neither Deena nor Nancy were in when I arrived so I sat for a while in the lobby listening to the wind rattling the doors, the groan of the building. When Nancy and Deena came in they were wild-eyed and breathless as though they had seen a phantom on the moor.

In keeping with the evening, the reading was melodramatic. You could almost hear bells tolling in the background. Thunder crashed. Nancy and I sat intimately, a small lamp glowing. She talked about some of the progressions occurring in my chart, then she asked me if I had had an accident on the back of my head. When I was young, still living on Hillcrest, I drove off the porch backwards on my tricycle and I pointed out the scar. Nancy said she asked that question because it was rare she encountered people whose Atlas chakras were wide open the way mine is; most people do exercises to open them. Most people she has run across like me had childhood accidents. She told me not to try developing my power without another person present, that those books are written for people who are psychically blind. Their suggestions are far too drastic for someone as attuned as me.

Meanwhile the trees were swishing wildly around, rain poured down, lightning split the sky. After we emerged from the cavern, Nancy and I embraced, then Deena and I embraced. Deena lent me a raincoat and I went out into the maelstrom, forgetting which direction the Metro was in. Water streamed from my coat, but eventually the orphan of the storm righted herself at the Alcan building. An unbelievably Gothic evening.

Fred and I went for a long drive out to the East End, past the refineries by the river. We listened to the tape Nancy had given me of the reading. She had not done a typical reading for me. She had said very little about my chart, or astrology at all. She tuned right into my dreams, the imagery, the sense of being in a dark pit. She suggested seeing a Jungian analyst. We drove past statues of religious men, historical men, relics of Europe, all blurred in the rain. Grey double-steeped churches contrasting with the restless luminous water, sometimes wild and silvery, sometimes glowing like a moonstone.

## May 21

Mary Rose visited this evening and brought some articles, a magazine and a book about auras to read. The magazine had an interesting article about the chakras. It was written from a christian perspective and incorporated the teachings of Jesus. Mary Rose retains a lot of her Catholicism. I learned that she grew up in Grande Prairie, Alberta, and that she used to drink the way young people in small towns do. We talked about smoking weed. She has even dropped acid once or twice and described the way she walked along the sidewalk looking intently at the cracks, gazing deeply into puddles.

We did Tarot readings in the kitchen. I like how MR handles the cards, the quiet contemplative look on her face as she shuffles them. I remember all the readings I did with Val. Val had a strong rapport with the cards but was erratic. If something didn't personally interest her, she simply wouldn't learn it or attempt to understand it. Mary Rose is much more in control. She can synthesize the meanings and I appreciate the time she puts into helping other people.

One of the readings she did for me was a character reading. The first card represented my best qualities; creativity, inventiveness, originality. The second was the card to represent my worst qualities. The card was the Hierophant and I had some problems with that. I really don't think I'm dogmatic and I'm pretty sure I don't rate high on the scale of conforming or upholding outmoded structures. I will not have this imposed on me. MY interpreted it for me in a whole new way. She said in my case the Hierophant represents society, that I compare myself to it too often. I don't let myself show the creativity and originality because of this view I have of society, of what I can or cannot be with other people. I do relate to that. It was a very insightful reading. Yes, I do care too much what people think of me and I do find it hard to be honest and unselfconscious and have always envied people like Marsha and Cathy Gray.

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Ran into Susan Kelly on Guy, near Cheap Thrills. She was walking slowly, almost like an acolyte, wrapped in her own thoughts. We talked for a while and then I accompanied her to an office so she could pick up an envelope. She is working in public relations for a company now and likes it. Her supervisor is very patient with her French.



She told me she knew a man who started a business out of his basement. She got him to write a reference for her, claiming she had worked for him for five years. She clipped the letter to the back of her CV. Just so she could get her start. We walked into a building which houses all kinds of offices, all looking mysterious and temporary. I joked about her envelope containing secret codes.

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Deena called and we talked for a little while. She asked me about the Nancy Hastings reading and laughed when I described the Gothic atmosphere, the thunder crashes you can hear on the tape during each pronouncement. Deena and I had an interesting conversation about the pseudo-spirituality that emerges from time to time, how neither of us takes well to it. Nancy Hastings's down-to-earth qualities were appreciated. It is not a crime to want to do something in the world. This is the biggest conflict I have with Mary Rose. She's quite smug about not wanting a job and there's always this little undertone that those of us who do, or who want to enter the working world, are not as spiritual or true to themselves as she is.

I learned a little about Deena's background. She is Reform (at the most). Her father had thought about becoming a rabbi and became a dentist instead. They paid very little attention to the rituals or traditions. Every Friday night she had to go for Sabbath dinner with her grandmother and she hated it. She has since realized that she kikes the traditions when they are not held in that old environment. She used to prepare her own Passover seders. She and her daughter would write their own Passover story and invite Gentiles over. A good, interesting talk.

## May 24

Party at Sally's for Cathy's birthday (which is actually tomorrow). Sally is always serving people. It wasn't just her husband – it's everyone. She made chili and tacos but spent so much time preparing and serving she didn't get much of a chance to talk with us. Cathy's brother and his girlfriend Susan were there. David Gray is much more serious and strait-laced than Cathy. The windows were open, music thumped from fire-escapes, tumultuous street sounds becoming a furor when the Canadiens won the Stanley Cup.

Mobs of people along Ste-Catherine. A bonfire blazed in the middle of the street, and we didn't see any cops. It was a Dionysian frenzy. Madness, bloodshed, dismemberment. Dionysius, the god of mob fury, religious ecstasy. Wine bottles rolling around on the ground, looting, hijacked buses. I could feel the strong hypnotic pull to this sea of people, this force that turns crowds into mobs. Debris all over the streets, trilobites abandoned in doorways, washed to shore by that huge tide.

## May 25

Astrology discussion group at our apartment again. Maybe because of last night's Stanley Cup riot, I am overly sensitive to colliding energies, undertones, cross-currents. Mary Rose seemed insufferable to me today, talking incessantly about her chart, her life, her self. No one could say anything without her cutting in with her own show-stopping anecdote. Usually I admire her ability to take the stage and be herself, but when she is on edge she has an insatiable need for attention. Today she seemed like a little kid who needed a time-out. Well, she does have a Venus-Pluto conjunction in Leo! Louise and Donna exchanged little smiles every time MR cut in. I felt divided between MR's sincerity and over-seriousness about herself and the boarding school mockery of Louise and Donna.

Eventually we talked about some of Louise's issues. Louise's face is unusual, striking and intense. Her eyes are clear green-grey, almond-shaped. Her features have a blown-glass delicacy and toughness. Her Moon is in Scorpio squared Mars and Pluto and she spoke violently against her mother, motherhood in general and about an aunt who is repeating her mother's pattern.

“I know if anyone tried to do the same thing to me I would kill them.” The split the group open and everyone rushed in to defuse the grenade. “Not physically,” Louise reassured us. “I have another better way of killing people. I feel real sympathy for her though. We discussed about how she hates the woman’s role in life and anything to do with motherhood. Once again Carolyn was the voice of reason. I just felt short-circuited.

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Mr Alchuk sent me a letter in response to my request for a reference. He also sent me a photocopy of the letter he sent to Mervin Butovsky, who is chair of the graduate department. So nice to hear from him. I can picture him flicking his hair back, sitting down at his desk and writing it all out with great dramatic flourish. His handwriting is so fluid, stylized; reminds me of a simulation of waves (water on rollers going back and forth).

“Dear Ms Battler, Lesley that is!

Nice having news from you especially when it’s all good. As usual you are busy but at least you’ve cut down on the travelling time. I thought I should get this letter off to Prof. Butovsky as soon as possible and I hope it is suitable and that you will be accepted.

At the moment, I am supervising a sup. exam and we are winding down the year. We have a small graduating class (about 28 from the day program) and jobs seem to be coming in.

I occasionally hear from your class but have no news to pass on. You’ll be happy to know that the air in the back of the lab HAS NOT improved!

All the best,  
Dan Alchuk”

The letter he sent to Professor Butovsky:

“Dear Sir:

Lesley Battler graduated from the two year Library Techniques program with high honours. Her assignments included reports, essays and practice projects on courses such as cataloguing, ordering, circulation, reference and work on the computer terminals.

“Ms Battler was exceptionally well organized and worked accurately with detail. She proved to be very flexible and exercised good judgment. She expressed herself in clear concise prose in her reports and her writing ability was exceptional (and a delight)

I highly recommend Lesley Battler for the graduate program for which she has applied.

Yours very truly

Daniel Alchuk”

Dear old Mr A. My good shepherd.

### **May 31**

Pot-luck party at Deena's. Disappointed that Susan wasn't there. She is feeling tired and anti-social. Mary Rose and Morrie were there. Unfortunately so was Rus Logush. His hair is now cut in very short bangs straight across his forehead, giving him a very severe, orthodox look. I talked with him for a little while about Chernobyl then fled. Poor Fred was cornered by him for a long time, having to listen to his belief that only the Northern races created long-lasting civilizations and that the British had an empire for 2000 years. He also expounded on how Jesus Christ walked around with a smile on his face. Poor Fred, taking it for the team. I had a good time, though. I amused and entertained Lorissa and Lise Simard. Mary Rose told me she had never seen that side to me before.

Mary Rose, Morrie, Fred and I left together. We talked with Deena for a while at the door. MR commented that Deena seemed friendlier these days, and in a better mood on the phone. There really is something about MR and Deena that doesn't connect. Deena didn't understand the remark. I, on the other hand, said Deena seemed to spend more time talking to the “rank and file.” This made her laugh for ages. You can never predict the chemistry between people. MR's comment got her back up; mine made her laugh. She said she knew she came across as being cold. I no longer see her that way at all.

Went to Mary Rose and Morrie's apartment. There is very little furniture, no impression of weight or permanence but it felt warm and comfortable. Morrie is quiet and serious. "Saturday Night Live" was on the TV and he was watching it as if he trying to discover why other people enjoyed it. He is nurturing and served us tisanes. He is always getting up and doing things for MR. She showed me some of her artwork. One piece was a black and white drawing of a Native woman with her head bowed slightly. Another black and white drawing of a veiled woman weeping, a white mask sitting on her dressing table. MR is planning to move back to Alberta and she gave me these drawings along with a stack of astrology magazines.

### **June 3**

News from Barrie. Doctors found a spot on x-rays of my father's lungs and it is cancer. He is being taken to Toronto on Saturday for an operation and if all goes well he may have six months to live.

To Barrie. Stayed at Boot's place at Kipling. Jim and his girlfriend are moving out. A friend of Nancy's is moving into Kipling and Boot is already complaining about her. Boot doesn't seem to get along with anyone. Reassuring in a way to see my parents in the flesh. My father seemed to half-enjoy the attention. He actually looked healthier than he did at Christmas. Fred and I had a good talk with my father. He really likes Fred and conversations always go smoother when Fred is here. Fred told my father he would always remember the trip to the Wye Marsh and photographing nature with him. My father feels his health really started to deteriorate four years ago, at the time of his male menopause. That's when everything started to fall apart.

We talked about university and how sending me was the best thing they could have done. For me, university was the big turning point in my relationship with him – actually, the beginning of any relationship at all. He had that sheepishly proud look on his face when he talked about how he had "knocked me over the head about Queen's."

Finally I asked why he felt so strongly about me going when my grade 13 marks were good but not particularly special. He said the marks themselves didn't mean anything and that it would be hard to find anyone who needed that experience more than I. He recalled me sitting in a ditch in PEI reading with a flashlight. I told him about applying for the Master's program at Concordia and he talked about his interests: history, geography, music. Photography, of course. He also mentioned painting and writing historical non-fiction. I have never seen any evidence of this!

He said he thought he and I had the same sorts of interests and motivations. Neither of us have ever had the interest in day-to-day details that my mother and Boot go on about. I feel he appreciates my life and he enjoys hearing our exploits. I will deeply miss that tacit support, especially when having to face Fred's overbearing family.

Sometimes silence can be deadly and destructive, made up of repressed anger. Other times it is used as a weapon, e.g. shunning. Finally it can be strong and deep, a support that goes beyond words. I have seen all three sides to my father's silence. I have always perceived him as silent, disapproving for the most part, but when I hear him talking with Fred I realize there are sides to him I never knew until now.

## **June 8**

Took my father to Women's College Hospital in downtown Toronto. Boot came with Fred and me. Nancy, Richard and my parents went in Nancy's car. My father has never looked smaller, more humbled. From the time we arrived at the hospital he had been squashed, compressed into small places, made to perform all the humiliating, bewildering tasks for bureaucracy. He looks like a wounded or puzzled animal who does not know what he is expected to do, or why he is being mistreated. We sat in the waiting room. My father shuffled in wearing his bathrobe, but again, he looked healthier to me than he had at Christmas. I couldn't think of him as a dying man. That is the very worst part of this "six month business." You cannot grieve or work it out. You cannot grieve for someone who is still alive, yet he can't figure in future plans. He is still here, but also already existing on another plane, a plane of memory. He is here yet not here. It is impossible to conceive of him being gone for good – I can't grasp it at all.

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Visited the Professor, Ron and Sir Jefforie in Orillia. Lovely talk with the Professor about my father. Sir J reacted with a pained expression. He did not want to hear about it. Still it was good to see this elusive, chimerical creature. Hair freshly cut, tinted red. He is so sensitive, so nice, so easily hurt but he has such a wicked weapon of humour and critical judgment. Groups and socializing are extremely important to him – but so too is withdrawal. He will simply retreat, disappear.

The Professor and Sir J grew up as next door neighbours in Barrie. They are once again next-door neighbours in Orillia, living in a building Ron owns. We joked a lot about the wickedness of landlords and tenants who are nothing but bums and drunks. The Prof and Sir J next door to each other in their ideal settings surrounded by harmony and beauty, both somehow trying to keep some kind of sadness at bay.

### **May 10**

Visited my father again just before the return trip to Montréal. He seemed more nervous, emotional. My mother had written out an emotional card and poem for him and sent it down to him through us. It sounded biblical. He glanced at the card then slipped it into the top drawer of his dresser. He looked like a babe in the woods standing there in his dressing gown. The three of us stood, shifting our feet, trying to think of something to say, but once again failing to think of anything remotely profound or comforting. Anyone could tell how deeply uncomfortable and trapped he felt. I was certain, too, he hated us seeing him like that. I guess, at least, he knows how much we care and how frightening we also find it. Hard to think of visiting Barrie again without him being there.

## June 11

Much as I have dearly loved our Côte-St-Antoine flat, the noise situation has become unendurable. We went to look at a duplex apartment tonight and signed a lease for July. I guess we're moving. The landlord, Lonni Gartner, is someone I really don't want to get close to, though. While we looked at the apartment she talked about how North Americans are not clean enough while wearing a disheveled house dress. She pounced on Fred for being Dutch. Then she took us into one of the bedrooms and said, "You look like a nice couple. I think we could be very happy together. So I am offering it to you first. If you want it, it's yours."

Fred and I thought for a while. We really did need to get away from the noise of our current place. We walked over to her house and signed the lease. While this took place she talked about Europe, the war-time reunions she liked to attend, the network of people she has all over the world in countries such as Germany, Austria, Argentina. I think we just signed a lease with a Nazi. Anglophone Montréal seems to be a bastion of bigots, people with serious bunker mentality – and now an actual Nazi. Later, when I met with the ASM at Deena's I told them about the landlord. "Did you check her lampshades?" said Deena.

Called Boot. Good news about Dad. He had the operation and the doctors think they managed to get all the cancer.

## June 13

Interview with Sheila MacIntosh at the CP Rail library. It is a big library and looks warm and comfortable. It is located in the concourse of Windsor Station, a beautiful limestone building. Shiela McIntosh came across as intelligent, very efficient. The head cataloguer was also present. They bantered like news anchors. The interview went pleasantly although I was told right at the start I was overqualified. It is a clerical job. They were especially interested in the library I set up for the ASM. Of course Sheila was skeptical and questioned my interest in the subject. I said I liked the psychological aspects of it, and it was an excellent opportunity to use my special library skills.



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Back to CP Rail to take a few tests. I was expecting typing and filing. What I got was typing in English, typing in French with no practice. I was led into a little room set up like a classroom with aisles of little desks and note pads. A very bureaucratic fellow sat at a teacher's desk, read a romance novel and administered tests to me while an alarm clock rang every five minutes or so. I was given spelling, vocabulary, word recognition and judgement tests. After I was finally released I knew I had no chance at this job. This was all done as some kind of rational, objective way they can disqualify me.

It's a clerical job, for crying out loud. As for the spelling and word recognition, I would have thought having a degree in English should have spared all of us from wasting our time. This is why I think this is all some kind of boondoggle way of eliminating people. From my work at TPF&C I do know this is a huge growing trend, part of a billion dollar human resources industry and I will only have to face more of this.

## **June 29**

Fred gone all day, helping Ya'acov photograph a wedding. At about 1 in the morning, Fred and Ya'acov returned laden with lilies, prayer-books, kippas, camera equipment, both of them ebullient. Ya'acov stayed for about an hour. I enjoyed seeing the two of them together doing this work.

Fred is also doing freelance word processing work for a Dr Mishkin (not to be confused with Dostoyevski's Prince Myshkin).

## **July 9**

Party-reading at Michèle's apartment on Queen Mary. Small but exquisitely painted and decorated. Michèle may be charming and often wistful but she is also extremely determined. She and her mother did all of the painting and it is flawless. She was dressed in black and looked austere tonight. In some ways Sally is the most accessible. She is very understanding. When she is nervous and uncomfortable, and this occurs often, she becomes compulsive, drinking glasses of wine, water, anything in reach and smoking a lot.

Cathy and David are both working in a garment factory and Cathy is infuriated about the sexual harassment she endures there. Cathy is intriguing. She is the model of the 1950s, early-60s girl, blond, wholesome, healthy – and she is completely aware of it. She used to love playing with Barbie dolls and reading Harlequin romances. She has a keen questioning mind though, and a self-awareness that subverts this conventional ideal of femininity. She says she would be perfect in advertising because she knows the ideas inside and out and would know exactly what would pull people. She said she could advertise for anyone, Calvin Klein, etc., but that she wouldn't because she thinks it would be dangerous.

Sally was like me when she was young, a tomboy who hated Barbie dolls. She has never read a Harlequin romance in her life – until now. She and Susan are trying to write one and make some money. Michèle is deeply against doing this, says it is prostitution. At first Cathy spoke out against Harlequins and all they stand for and she refused to read Susan's first chapter. She changed her mind and went through it with quick and expert suggestions.

Michèle invited their script-writing professor, Michel Choquette. He brought flowers and was gracious and helpful to us all. He read one of his own works that had been published in *National Lampoon*. The piece was a boy's school life but written in the style of Raymond Chandler. He read it that way too. A hilarious piece and what a cool idea. I read my new story, "Edge of the Universe." It felt good seeing Cathy and Sally sharing a copy. Sally said it had been such a long time since she has seen my work and she missed it. Everyone laughed at the jokes and Michel made a couple of very useful suggestions. Such a sympathetic supportive group! Susan read part of her long script. She is straightforward and practical with a great sense of humour. She doesn't seem to struggle with self-worth. She's writing with the straight-up goal of selling it.

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Brunch with Sally and Michèle at La Tulipe Noire (Ste-Lucie salad, margueritas and Dream Pie). Sally and I wandered through an exhibition of children's art from around the world, which was being held in the same building. Sally loves children, loves taking care of Laura, but she's definite about not wanting another husband. Michèle keeps telling her she will change her mind. Sally and I talked about artificial insemination. Michèle looked at Sally with wide eyes and said, "I can't believe I'm talking about these things!" "These things" happen with Sally.

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Met Mary Rose and we went to Carolyn's apartment for our astrology group meeting. Our original foursome tonight – Mary Rose, Robert, Carolyn and me. A nice comfortable group. Robert is beginning his recovery. He loves our group because of the intimate way we can speak to each other about ourselves. The astrology gives us a language to use that inspires intimacy without seeming to pry.

He was amazed by our acceptance of the idea of him seeing a counsellor, and Carolyn's suggestions and contacts. Robert seems to put himself in rigid authoritarian positions where he can't truly be himself. He lavishes attention and money on trying to please his family, hoping for love and approval that never come his way. At his work they mock him for being "the nice guy." Even his home life is structured and there are parts of him that his wife doesn't see. This group is his outlet. His openness with us is special. So is his need – and ability – to search and question.

Mary Rose and I stepped out on Carolyn's balcony. The view of the city was incredible, office towers fading into the darkness, windows filled with light like portals into the night sky. Light all around. Trapdoors, stage entrances, fire escapes, back ways into other worlds, multiple dimensions. There's the mountain, the Place Ville-Marie searchlight. I imagined celestial elevators taking people to the top of the lights.

## July 19

Hottest weather yet but the best moving day we've ever had. We hired the Concordia Moving Company and they had all our stuff down all those stairs and inside the new apartment within three hours. Competent, professional and nice guys! We also had Sally, Michèle and Dave Billeter helping us. This is the first move we've made without a Boot visit. Sally, Michèle and Dave all think the new apartment is beautiful. Michèle looked at the room with her designer's eye and made a few suggestions. After we finished, Sally, Michèle, Fred and I had ice cream at Swenson's.

## July 20

Sally and I met David, Cathy Michèle and Brian at Longueuil Metro. We piled into a car and went to Susan's for a reading and swim party. A storm raged in and we gathered in Susan's living room and read parts of her humorous script. I read the part of "Dr Wise," the powerful and manipulative director of a major urban hospital. David read the part of one of her creations, who in time leads a hospital rebellion. Cathy was the beautiful woman underling and Sally played "Jane" an innocent outsider entering the hospital to find a friend.

We got caught up. David has been looking for a new apartment and keeps coming across ones which have had people die in them. Michèle brought a portfolio of her poetry. I think her poetry is her best writing; intense, passionate with unique whimsical touches. While we sat in the whirlpool feasting on grapes, Sally, Cathy, Susan and Michèle argued over Harlequin romances. David was drawn into the fray and agreed with Cathy and Michèle (the no side). Susan and Sally are writing Harlequins to make money. Susan asked Cathy to look at her first chapter and give her some constructive criticism. Cathy refused.

Cathy said she read thousands of those books when she was a teenager and fell for the whole image of man and woman as they are presented in them. Now she thinks they are terrible; seductive and destructive. Violence toward women is presented so pervasively it becomes acceptable, and women think this is what romance is and that this is what they should desire.

Michèle said very passionately that she could never use her talent to write something she does not agree with, to do that only for money is prostitution. She wouldn't want to write something she couldn't sign her real name to. Pragmatists Sally, Susan and Brian saw nothing wrong with it. The books sell in the millions. The fantasy is already deeply ingrained, there is obviously a market, why not tap into it and make some money so they can keep going with their "real" writing. As for me, I have never read any of the books, never been interested in them and was completely won over by Cathy and Michèle.

There is a lot of discipline in Michèle. She does everything wholeheartedly, and she has a need to feel she can do everything herself. When we were moving she lifted the heaviest loads. At the pool she went out in the rain and while the rest of us reclined in the whirlpool, Michèle did laps in the pool. For our party she designed beautiful fans and fortune cookies for us all, complete with messages typed to look authentic. We played water polo and I was surprised by her competitiveness, not with us, but with herself.

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Fred juggling two jobs these days. Weekends at Astral, which he enjoys. By day he is doing computer work at an engineer consulting firm in Old Montréal. He doesn't talk about the computer job much and I don't think he enjoys it.

### **Aug. 3**

Sally, Michèle and I went to Old Montréal and wandered into a flea market. Sally fell in love with an old fashioned wicker bassinette. She is determined that she wants a baby by next year when she finishes school. She has been shocking Michèle with all her research on artificial insemination. Sally does not want another husband. She said that when she was young she had always imagined being a mother but never having a husband. I also never imagined being married and find it an odd thing to have happened in my life.

Cathy has written a script. According to Sally and Michèle it's good, very personal about disillusionment, the ideal, the image society has as opposed to the reality. Cathy put a lot of herself in it and Michèle cried. I guess this means I have to get a move on fixing up our apartment so I can hold a party/reading and hear it. Sally is ambitious and still wants to be in publishing. I remember some photos she showed us in Colin's class of her interviews with various Canadian writers and the seriousness of her expression. Michèle is going back to school. I'm very glad to hear that. Education is very important to her and her name is on the Dean's Honour List.

Michèle is also feeling depressed over some family issues. She feels she is the only one in her family who makes any attempt to keep them together. She is learning not to try so hard, that she can't be the one who makes all the effort. She had to write a letter to her brother to tell him how she felt, that she just doesn't share his interests and has to go her own way.

### **Aug. 22**

Susan Kelly called. I'm going to do the Montréal report for the Across Canada feature in *the FCA Journal* for Susan. Dropped my little report off to her today. She lives only a block away from the St-Viateur bagel factory. I had the wrong street for a while and kept passing groups of Chasidic Jews in the black coats and streimlichs. There are all kinds of tiny shuls, hideaways, meeting places, unobtrusive Hebrew signs. Susan's new apartment is on Esplanade and her building was teeming with people, children everywhere, long long Dostoyevskian stairway. The apartment itself is beautiful, twelve-foot ceilings, nooks, crannies, half-rooms with art deco embellishments. Someone left behind an old harmonium which really suits the apartment. Susan had found an old framed "cradle roll" certificate, which she hung over the harmonium. Neither of us has ever heard of a cradle roll. We talked, mostly about work, listened to music with mandolins and I loved being in this space listening to the rain.

**Aug. 27**

Small house-warming party/reading. Tried to reach Stephen Schettini but he never returned my call. Apparently Cathy and Sally have written him off. Lila, Sally, Cathy and Michèle came over. The apartment did look lovely with soft warm lighting. Sally and Michèle praised some pastels I had framed and hung on the walls. They hardly believed that most people either patronize them or damn them with socially polite silence. Sally showed a great understanding and insight talking about them. Cathy forgot to bring her script so I ended up reading from a too-long work-in-progress and felt like an egomaniac, luring people over just to read at them. Cathy is a sharp critic and she gave me good suggestions.

Michèle and Cathy curled up close beside Lila on the couch and everyone looked cozy. They also praised my photograph of mountains in Vermont hanging over the couch. At the end Michèle said, “Your apartment is beautiful, you can write, you can draw better than I can, you can take pictures ... I don’t know about you.” But I was most pleased by how they accepted and understood my pastels.

**Oct. 29**

Pleasant birthday. Warm, festive kind of day. Mary Rose and Morrie have moved, not to Vancouver, but to an duplex a couple of blocks away from ours. She dropped by with a card and a blueberry pie. She was childlike today and we had a delightful conversation. She is housekeeping, looking after someone’s small daughter and taking a psychology course at Concordia. Today I was with the Mary Rose I like best, the playful whimsical side that Deena has never seen. She can be an insufferable blowhard, though. She never just doodles or sketches, she’s always getting into her art. She never takes pictures, she is always doing photography. Her daydreams are “creative visualization,” but I didn’t get this side of her today. MR is able to come out of herself and see things from a more objective perspective.

Picnic with Fred in the back of the car on Mt-Royal lookout. Cards from Joanne Montemurro, Fred Merritt, Sharon and Nancy Dewdney. Later, Fred surprised me by taking me to a kosher restaurant on Queen Mary called Milk and Honey. I could have sworn I was in New York. Ya'acov and Kayla eventually showed up (they run on Jewish time, which I have seen for myself at their shul). Kayla is pregnant and they are both glowing.

Seen quite a bit of Y and K lately. Last week we were at Ya'acov's parents' house along with Fred's Astral pals including Stephane and Ness. Got to meet various members of Ya'acov's family. They were holding a chocolate fondue Sukkot party. Everyone was lively and interesting. Ya'acov was a charming expansive host. Kayla has already started playing her mother role to the hilt, exaggerating all her symptoms, referring to the foetus as her "little fish." She can be endearing when she takes your arm and pulls you into the washroom as if she is going to confide all her secrets. I admire Ya'acov's stability, the way he is centered in himself and his world, the values he has and the value he knows he has.

After our dinner tonight we went to the Vieux Dublin. I joined in the darts games and met an odd but chivalrous little man who owns the NDG dart shop, which was right around the corner from our Cote St-Antoine apartment. Had a good talk with a red-haired Irish barmaid named Harriet about Indonesia. Kayla wandered off downstairs to listen to the musician and flirt with the men, inspecting chest hair wherever she might find it. I love how open and secure those two are in their relationship, how both flirt equally and seem to encourage each other to do it. Unlike fundamentalist christians, these two have such a refreshing, natural open sex life. "We're married – not dead," Ya'acov often says.

## **Oct 31**

Fred dressed as an obnoxious newspaper photographer, *National Enquirer* type. He called himself Scoop Craven and wore a tie with a bullfighter on it. We claimed he had been with Ernie and the boys during the Spanish Civil War and had taught Hemingway all he knew. I dressed as a fortune-teller, which seemed completely apropos. We met Cathy and went on to Sally's place. David Gosselin now lives in the same building, which makes it really easy to gather.



Cathy warned us that she could become crazy and foul-tongued at a party, especially after drinking. She is so honest, uninhibited and unpredictable. Charismatic too. I always envy people with charisma, or presence, so much. We met at David's apartment. He has a typewriter set up in his bedroom. We had a good talk about writing with Cathy and Sally helped each other change.

Cathy and Sally re-emerged dressed as a baby and a mouse respectively. They both said they were dressed as their alter-egos. They dressed David up as a sheik and dubbed him "Abdullah." Then we went to the party, held by friends of Cathy's. She did everything she claimed she would do. We hollered "Ab-DOOOL" at the tops of our voices. We danced, drank beer, acted out an amazing melodrama in which Cathy found someone dressed as a priest and brought him over to bless the baby. Then we called for a nurse. We knelt and bowed to Allah and had wonderfully absurd conversations with Julius Caesar and Marc Antony, who had English accents. "Well, we must go now," Caesar said sprightly. "We have countries to conquer."

Cathy and I ended up in a strange confessional conversation in which she said I looked sexy and had sexy eyes. I said I thought I was downright ugly, mostly because of my teeth and camel-like profile. Then Cathy started talking about the problems she was having with her step-mother, how everything was all right when she was younger but now her step-mother hates her. She told me she was fat when she was in high school so she thought she was ugly too.

Sally felt badly that her current boyfriend, Grant, wasn't there. The evening ended abruptly when she decided she couldn't leave her mother and step-father alone for another minute and went home. All my evenings with these guys end like this.

#### **Nov. 4**

Went to a Kathy Acker reading at Les foufounes électriques. It was like stepping into a giant psychotic kindergarten for the kids out of *Lord of the Flies*. Spray-paint, graffiti, little rooms and niches painted volcanic reds and blacks.

While in the bar, which consisted of a few stools and places to stand, overturned cardboard boxes to set drinks, a brawl broke out. Blend of 1980s barely below the surface violence, the underworld and 1960s psychedelic hallucination. I have always been intrigued by this place and finally had the excuse to go.

Mary Fowke came in. Really nice to see her. She was one of my favourite people in Colin's class. We didn't often see each other but every time we did it was meaningful. She can be nervous and ill-at-ease (Fred noticed how fidgety she is) and often she retreats. She joined us for the reading and we had a good long talk about writing and living in Paris (always a dream of mine). Like the rest of us, she misses Colin and has sent work to him just to get his comments. Her work is becoming even more abstract. I mentioned my dilemma between wanting to write more abstract, language-based pieces and wanting to tell a story with characters. Mary said that abstract writing is personal because it is the personal eye that selects the details. The two of us could be given the exact same vocabulary words and write completely different pieces. She loved Paris and has mixed feelings about being back in Canada. Her major reason for returning was so her family wouldn't think she had cut off all her roots.

In Paris she lived a vagabond life and it's easier there to get small jobs for an hour or two every day, just enough to live on and be able to stay. That sounds ideal to me. Mary looked spartan, dressed in black and khakis. She said the French were difficult to get to know but she met a lot of other visitors and connected with a writers' group, which she loved. She met some people who have published in Colin's magazine. We talked about *Writing* for a while and how there are so few new writing forums here in Canada. And what we do have seems almost entirely devoted to very conventional literary stories. Mary also visited Sylvia Beach's bookstore "Shakespeare and Company" and even stayed overnight in it. Finally Acker started her reading. We sat scrunched up like little kids sitting on a stoop. It was a nice way to hear a reading.

I have read short pieces and interviews of Acker's that have blown me away. Her work is collage-like, clean-edged, tough, cutting as barbed wire. Completely unsentimental. A shocking and eye-opening look at society. Tonight she read a new science-fiction piece. She made it clear she really didn't want to do this reading, and I thought she was quite ungracious to someone who called out to her in French. I am so glad I had a chance to see her, though. She is an important figure and I feel as if I've been to an actual Event. I also think her significance is only going to grow over the years. She is ushering something in that we won't even see or know for years. Her sentences were clear and resonant, as cold and shocking as the weather outside after leaving the heat, colour, smoke and sensory barrage of les Foufounes.

#### **Nov. 5-17**

Another interview under my belt, this time with Janet Pasternak at the Federal Business Development Bank. Ms P very professional. I did all right.

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Got the job at FBDB. Acquisitions. It's a contract job so it won't last forever (hooray).

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First day at FBDB. A roaring Athabasca of people at Place Victoria. Back to the unreal world of carpeted elevators, gleaming floors, polished walls with no sign of age or wear. Tinted chrome, canned air, muzak. Cliff dwellings. I can't think of anything more boring than Acquisitions. All I do is take apart, shuffle and file hundreds of little rainbow-coloured purchase order forms. Now I know why people burn their backlog. Dark so early. Skeletal trees. Buildings, slate-grey, obsidian, windows reflecting a luminous blue light, like mountain lakes cut deeply into rock. I have never felt more ethereal in my life – not even at TPF&C, where I was concentrating so hard on doing a good job. Here I know everything that comes into this library from price to size but I never see any of it, not even to touch. Phantom books! All I handle are pieces of paper which I shuffle about all day.

There is no contact with any of the people in this library either. No one even say good morning to each other when they come in. I do like the manager, David Rowe. I like his sense of humour and down-to-earth quality. I am becoming used to librarians who have an unironic respect for the departments, executives and clients they work for, a respect that so often seems obsequious. David isn't like that and it is refreshing. He'll call the bad ones bozos, idiots, etc.

### **Nov. 20**

First blizzard. 105 bus packed. I arrived home to find a note from a Johanne McCreath with an address on Decarie Blvd. I didn't recognize the name. Turns out she's Johanne Cunliffe, my classmate from Seneca. She married Andy and they have been living here since June. We haven't been in contact and she forgot I was living here. Now she wants to get in touch. I called her and was glad I did. We had a good long talk. I had forgotten how easy it is to talk with her.

She is finding Montréal quite an adjustment, so different from Toronto. She is taking a rigorous French course and probably speaks it better than I do now. She also wants to work in a university library and applied for the same job I did. She was also on the short list. I told her about the Special Libraries Association job bank. She went to Ellen Ryan's wedding. I've never thought it would be a match made in heaven. There is so much beneath Ellen's conservative surface. I wonder how it will turn out.

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Visit with Ya'acov and Kayla. Their apartment is comfy mayhem. Y's photo equipment strewn everywhere. Kayla is miserable in her pregnancy, says she has no tolerance for any kind of pain. Just like Ya'acov she loves her role as Orthodox Jew, her position in the community, loves using Hebrew and Yiddish words sprinkled with some salty Maritimes expressions. She is originally from Nova Scotia. Both are blunt and down-to-earth about their sexuality. Y told us that he likes kinky sex more than Kayla and they have this deal that if he finds someone else who likes kinky sex as much as he does, both he and Kayla can make love with other people.

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“Sometimes the horizon is defined by a wall behind which rises the noise of a disappearing train. The whole nostalgia of the infinite is revealed to us behind the geometrical precision of the square. We experience the most unforgettable movements when certain aspects of the world, whose existence we completely ignore, suddenly confront us with the revelation of mysteries lying all-time within our reach and which we cannot see because we are too short-sighted, and cannot feel because our senses are inadequately developed. Their dead voices speak to us from near-by, but they sound like voices from another planet.”

-Giorgio de Chirico

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Crazy ASM meeting at Deena's. I don't know what was up but we were irrepressible. She was trying so hard to be good and respectable, filling out all of the lottery forms for grant money and none of us would settle down long enough to give her any help. Not even André. Solemn André who usually dresses like a little Puritan minister was laughing – a really Puckish laughter. He constantly made mischievous little hokes. The change in him is dramatic and we teased him about the influence the race-track has had on him. André thinks he lived a past life in England. On a visit to London he went everywhere in the city and it was as if he knew the place, that it had always been familiar to him. I mentioned my immediate attraction to Montréal from the first moment I stepped foot in it. Lorissa was very surprised to hear that – she is another who thought I had lived here all my life.

Lorissa was in a terrible mood after having had her car licence revoked and I was bored after a long tedious day at work. We struck sparks tonight. She laughed at my snarky jokes and I returned the favour. I made Pat Taylor-like declarations about blowing things up, including Lise Simard's mother's church parish, which made everyone laugh. Pat Taylor is one of our more infamous members. She is a small, older, eccentric woman who is on a macrobiotic diet while incessantly smoking. I see that a lot in this city.

She worked in a chemistry lab and was fired because she kept blowing things up. Susan told me she could teach me how to make Molotov cocktails. I made everyone laugh again when I riffed about my stand-up comedy routine – bringing astrology into the Borscht Belt. Someday André and I will meet in Vegas, he at the race track and I in a lounge doing my routine. Deena peered at me through her glasses. “I like you this way.”

Susan, at age 35, still does toe-dancing in her ballet classes. She had her slippers with her and I found them fascinating, shell-pink, worn and hard as stone. I appreciate Deena more and more as I get to know her. She sounds like a writer, the way she tosses off perceptive little observations about people, little gems of wisdom.

### **Dec. 9**

Accepted into the Master’s program – or at least my portfolio was. I managed to get Professor Butovsky to tell me how the portfolio actually made out. If it was marginal and accepted after someone dropped out and left a space, I’m not very interested in committing any time, effort or money in taking the program. I can think of cheaper ways of humiliating myself. Prof B tried to hew to the party line but eventually told me that two readers had written “excellent,” and the third, “very high quality.”

### **Dec. 18**

Dinner at Kazouzz with Sally, Cathy, Michèle and Sally’s boyfriend’s sister Sandra. It was fun. I told them about Stephen Schettini going after Marc LeMay’s girlfriend and about Colin being a father. We told stories of our trials and tribulations trying to work in French. Sally loves Christmas and all the trappings. She gave us all cards, from her and her cats, Sybil and Augustus. She is so much more relaxed than when I first met her, less nervous. Her stories and anecdotes not nearly as fragmented, disjointed. I wondered what ever happened to Darlene McRae?

Cathy was Cathy, saying whatever came into her head. It's fascinating to talk with her. You never know what twists and turns it will take. She had a book, *The Selfish Giant*, with her. It had been her favourite story when she was young. I love the story too and we talked about how it can still make us cry. Michèle arrived, beautifully dressed but very depressed. She thinks her life is boring, and most of her jokes were about how boring her life is. She is also depressed about Christmas. She isn't going to visit her parents in Lorraine until the 25<sup>th</sup> because they aren't planning to do anything, "so what's the point in bothering?" Sally, Cathy and I merrily exchanged cards, but when I gave a card to Michèle I could tell it was an uncomfortable burden. She took down my address and now I know I will receive a duty card.

Stephen Schettini sent Michèle a Christmas card in which he apologized for having been too busy to see her. He is playing with her, and this is the last thing in the world she needs right now. We all booed him. None of us had liked him in Colin's class. Ira had some strong words about him when we were in Scott's class. I only started liking him when we met at his apartment. "You can tell he'd do it with anything," harrumphed Cathy.

### **Dec. 19-21**

To Kingston by bus. The Smith-Futtit house was full of Christmas decorations but Marsha was listless, her stomach still bothering her. She seems discontent with John. Her remarks about him were often snarky and she was tyrannical with him when he was drunk and played Bruce Springsteen. It was one of the few times he showed his displeasure to Dave Clark and me. There were a few times when it looked like he was gritting his teeth. We certainly had good moments and I didn't regret visiting but the last really good talk I've had with Marsha was about Sharon. That split between her and Sharon has wounded her deeply.

Nice visit with Eileen and Sophia. We decorated a tree, drank hot cider and Eileen played some truly lovely Christmas music. Marsha kept saying that the tree decorating was to exorcise the bad feelings from last year, but there was something a little spiritless about the evening. The visits are starting to have an obligatory quality to them. A couple of times Dave Clark said, "But I came up to visit *you*, Marsha."

Watched a late-night Cary Grant movie. Billed as a tear-jerker, it was actually disgusting. A 1940s couple wants to adopt a blond, blue-eyed baby boy with dimples and curly hair. They end up with a girl. Many touching scenes later the girl grows up enough to become an angel in the school Christmas play. Very subtle. Two scenes later she succumbs to Old Movie Disease and dies. The couple is upset for a couple of frames and the the fairy godmother from the orphanage calls and says there is another child; miraculously enough, a two-year-old blond boy with curly hair and dimples. Wow.

Long talk with Marsha and Dave about cartoons we watched as kids. We could all come up with lines, scenes, dialogue from years ago, but Dave remembered the most and the farthest back in time. He could identify some horrifying early Warner Brothers cartoons of which I have only retained nightmarish fragments. He recalled the jungle cartoons with the little black boy followed by his shadow, the mynah bird. The menacing music, the way they all walked in rhythm through the jungle. Marsha said those ancient cartoons gave us our first exposure to classical music.

True, but what I remember most are the moods they created, how ominous the mynah bird cartoon was. The size distortions frightened me as will, the way something frightening would loom huge from a bush or behind a tree or even out of nowhere while the character shrank in size. I may have been frightened by them, but I was also fascinated and entranced and these fragments still resonate and inform my imagination.

Marsha recalled one with the little boy who wore big spectacles, who had to go to the blackboard and work out an insanely complicated, meaningless arithmetic problem. He shrinks, the blackboard becomes huge. The numbers turn into weapons and laugh at him, huge, bulbous weapons. The scene shifts and he is in a black bomber plane fighting off the enemy. Pure genius, in drawing, animation and psychology. It is the way I felt about math, except I always going down in defeat.



## Dec. 24

Nice surprise at work. David Rowe gave everybody a bottle of his homemade wine along with a card thanking us for a great job. Then we went into Management Services for a glass of cognac. Left at noon – a warm happy feeling. Enjoyed seeing all the office people coming and going with presents, accompanied by their kids and spouses.

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3 movies: *Something Wild*, *Blue Velvet* and *Betty Blue*. To me, all three were about hauntings – women haunted, possessed by anima figures. These women leave the familiar behind but are unable to return to “reality.” They enter a dream where nothing matters any more except the relationship which exists outside of time, space and convention. Both *Something Wild* and *Blue Velvet* present men as I for some kind of shock or initiation by women who terrorize them. At the same time, the women also live in terror of male psychopaths who have actually been the ones behind the creation of these underworld sexual caverns.

There was a lot I liked about *Something Wild*, its quirkiness, unpredictability (at least at the beginning). Scenes flashed by as quickly as objects are passed on a highway. I loved the rootlessness, the highway, the characters driven half-mad by sheer velocity and ungroundedness. It was a combination of David Byrne’s *True Stories* and Diane Arbus. Strange isolated characters found off the highways seems to be really big in movies and books this year. Audrey’s mother was terrific, a real Diane Arbus character playing her harpsichord, smiling with calcified sweetness.

For me, the movie lost its energy as soon as the psycho husband was introduced. Maybe it was because *Blue Velvet* was still fresh in my mind. My first reaction was, “psychotic husband, damn, all the fun ends now.” And it did. The Melanie Griffiths character lost her wildness and I thought she turned into a submissive moll or groupie. I found myself wondering why the husband had to be in the movie at all – along with what seems a requisite violent dénouement. Why couldn’t the journey, the encounter between the white-bread executive and the self-created woman, be the entire story? It would have been so much more challenging to stage this journey through weird America with him simply trying to come to terms with her, and what she was releasing in his own character.

*Blue Velvet* - an obsessive movie. Claustrophobic where *Something Wild* was panoramic and rootless. Believe was coloured and lit like a dream you can't escape. The apartment was shadowed and weighted by history, memories, ancient and inbred fantasies, a museum of repressed desires. Haunting memories from childhood all in shadows, sepias, dusky blues. It brought to life the fears and fantasies of sex and desire. The tension between this steaming psychic cavern and the coloured fragmented light of the church windows. The "real" world is not rescue in this move. The "real" world is presented with such falseness, the images so clichéd and heightened, the blindingly white picket fence, the bird landing on the windowsill, that this is yet another fairytale world. The bird, for instance, looks stuffed. The picket-fence world is as unreal and ominous as the dream world, which it barely conceals. Isabella Rossellini is rescued from the dragon's mouth only to be returned to the castle.

*Betty Blue* by Jean-Jacques Beineix. His movies are gorgeous. Every frame precisely designed, sumptuous in colour and detail. He seems to have foraged through his other movies *Diva* and *Moon in the Gutter*, both of which I love, for some of the images that reappear in this movie like fetish objects. He also expresses isolation beautifully. When each scene is so beautifully set up and arranged, it draws focused visual attention. It reminds me of close-up photographs of the hearts of flowers. You forget anything else that exists around that powerful image in front of you, and it becomes powerful, isolated, separated. In the opening scenes, the isolation and intensity of the couple is depicted with precision and clarity. A clarity that resonates; winter, carousel horses, carnival trappings, flimsy houses with no connection to the earth.

It's a haunting obsessive story of a gentle man and an explosive, unstable woman who becomes his muse, his anima figure, more symbolic than real. He follows her wherever she goes, possessed by this violent feminine spirit who torches interiors, breaks down walls. She eventually goes mad and is taken away. His cries of "Bet-ty, Bet-ty" are heart-rending. When he goes to the hospital/asylum dressed up as her, I felt he finally understood his obsession, the Betty he needed so desperately was actually himself. I saw both self-awareness, selflessness and real love when he smothers the Betty that is no more, drugged, comatose, spiritless, tears streaming down his cheeks. When he becomes aware of the anima figure he can lay its ghost to rest, and become real himself.

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Barrie. My father becoming more ghostlike every time I see him. My mother said something interesting about Boot that I hadn't thought of before, that Boot doesn't face anything emotional at all. She reacts emotionally, flares up in a temper, stalks off for a while but always returns as if nothing has ever happened, completely oblivious to anyone else's need to face something, discuss it or work it out.

Went for a drive through the city with my parents, Fred driving, my father navigating. All the subdivisions. I won't move back to Ontario, great province of the dispossessed, where childhood haunts have vanished off the face of the earth, like European countries – territories in memory only. The weather makes everything look bleak, impoverished, craters where there were once trees, hills, history. But they like these drives and I'm the only one bothered by all this development. Maybe it doesn't have so much impact if you live there and it happens all the time incrementally. Midhurst: retreating forests like shreds of felt, rusty wire fences, stringwork of roads.

Sir J called and invited us for a visit. The drive to Orillia was full of magic. Snow glowing like a moonstone, vastness of night, shadows pulled like veils across the lustrous snow. Headlights illuminating the stone wall, tall mysterious cedars. A voyage into the interior for me. Great visit with my witty, debonair old friend.

### **New Year's Eve**

Fred and I went car-camping in Vermont. The roads were empty, fields and woods becoming mysterious, incorporeal. Radio voices rose, fell over hill tops; ghost towns with rows of houses that fall back as if mown down. Pressing a button cuts off the voices, isolates me in my space ship. Lights pass over me but only for the moment. Distant mountains, lights of isolated houses, temporary camps. Tiny villages, displaced, ambulatory, Warner Brothers towns being pursued all across the Urals, the Carpathians. A drive down to the water. Always a beyond.